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**The Memory of Generations:
Time, Narrative and Kinship in Damascus, Syria**

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Abstract

‘Bless you, may you bury me’ is a common refrain among older people in the Syrian capital Damascus, directed especially towards children and young adults when they help with daily tasks or provide joy by their play or achievements. The sentiment expresses the hope that the old may die before the young and be mourned by them. It makes explicit the interlocking of life-cycles, through aging and mortality, and presumes an understanding of ideal kinship temporality where successive generations succeed one another in their proper order. It also hints that there is no certainty in this process. Sustaining these ideals is contingent on persistent material and symbolic work, a tempering of hope with memory and experience. These types of daily reckoning of personal and kinship time through mortality and life courses are rarely explored in the literature on Middle Eastern kinship. But how do these formations of time and generation sustain and transform?

Anthropological theorising on the ‘Arab Family’ models it as cyclically reproducing roles, while socio-historical discussions of regional ‘transformations’ in politics and society understand them as lineal and successive. Both contain implicit speculations about the perceptions of time and the role of generations. Neither model, however, fully addresses the instrumentality of the types of temporality and generation they presume. What is it about the unfolding of familial and social generations and the temporality they imbue that is so integral to the models of kinship and society used to understand the region? And what is happening when historical change and familial generations interact?

Based on 18 months of fieldwork, this thesis explores the interrelationships of Damascene life courses and their reciprocity with the historical context in which processes of birth, maturation, procreation and death take place. It describes subjective dispositions manifested at specific points in the life course and the manner in which individuals relate to past, present and potential selves, through memory, narrative and historicity, and through the unfolding sensual experience of time, place and objects. These inter-generational relationships illustrate not a recycling, but rather an historical and historicising process through transformative exchange and reciprocity. By tracing the shifts in the narratives of kinship in and through time, I consider Damascene history and time as emergent properties of inter- and intra-generational dynamics within a supple kinship system. I assert that however much kinship activities such as eating together, transmitting property, marrying, bringing up children and giving them names may be concerned with maintaining order and propriety, they are also contentious creative forces whose tensions and joys are paramount to Syrian social transformation.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work based on my original research, with acknowledgement of other sources and references, and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Dated:

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Note on transliteration

Within this text Arabic terms and phrases, shown in italics, have been transcribed based on the system employed by Cowan's translation of Hans Wehr's dictionary with the following simplifications: *t̤* as *th*, *k̤* as *kh*, *ḏ* as *dh*, *š* as *sh* and *ḡ* as *gh*. The *hamzah* is denoted by an apostrophe. The velarized or 'emphatic' consonants are transcribed with a dot under the letters: *ḥ*, *ṣ*, *ṭ*, *ẓ*, and *ḍ*. These sounds have a 'heavy' resonance which is in contrast to the 'lighter' or 'thinner' sound of corresponding plain consonants (transcribed without a dot). Long vowel sounds are represented as such: *ā* for *aa*, *ī* for *ee* and *ū* for *oo*.

All formal or classical terms such as legal, official or religious nomenclature are transcribed in accordance with Cowan's translation of Hans Wehr. Due to the verbal and narrative content of the ethnography presented the majority of Arabic words and phrases are transcribed in accord with the manner spoken by my informants which does not always correspond with classical or standardised vocabulary, morphology and syntax. As a result Stowasser and Ani's dictionary of spoken Arabic and Cowell's *A Reference Grammar of Syrian Arabic*, which both use Damascene Arabic as their basis, are employed to help capture the dialect. In particular short vowel sounds may not be consistent with classical and standardised renditions. In addition the common term for house/home I have rendered *beit* rather than *bait* which is unsatisfactory for English readers.

Spoken Damascene Arabic is very similar to that spoken across the Levant. It contains several distinctive qualities which reflect its place as an urban dialect and can be heard in its playful, evolving slang and the constant give and take between written and spoken forms as well as the different groups who populate the city. As a consequence variation within and between common terms permeates the speech recorded here. Dialect is interspersed with quasi-classicisms and the conscious use of characteristic colloquialism for their expressive effect is demonstrated. Thus the purely dialectical term for 'officer' *ẓābet* may often be interchanged with the classicism *ḏābet* under the influence of increased literacy. Similarly, although officially expunged from modern Arabic, terms and forms of Ottoman Turkish

pepper daily speech. A distinctive quality of Damascene speech is the merger and replacement of the *q* (*qaf*) sound with the *hamzah* or glottal stop (a practice akin to dropping ‘t’ in some British dialects), meaning that for example the common word for ‘heart’ *qelb* is pronounced ‘*elb*. Because some classicisms such as *huqūq*, meaning law, are pronounced with the true *q* I have transcribed all words as if the *q* is voiced.

Another feature of the speech transcribed in this text is the Damascene practice of elision, assimilation and in particular consonant swapping. For example the common terms for husband and wife, though more formally *zauj* and *zauja* they are habitually spoken as *jauz* and *jauza*. Exactly because they were so aware of the importance of language my informants regarded these forms of expression as integral to their identity. For most uttered speech there is not a standardized way of spelling as they are not officially written, although they are increasingly inscribed in both Arabic and Roman letter-number combinations through various communications media. Consequently within the text colloquial spoken terms have been translated and spelt according to the phonetic transcriptions given by Stowasser and Ani with additional help from Cowell’s Reference Grammar of Syrian Arabic. These terms are marked in the text *colloq.* in order to denote their colloquial character but there is of course an ever changing spectrum between more or less formal terminologies. Where I quote from or refer to others work I have modified their transliteration to conform to the scheme used here. Finally, where appropriate, proper nouns for people and places are transcribed to maintain the Romanized spelling preferred by my informants themselves or that on official documentation such as maps, and treated as English words to better maintain the flow of the text.

Introduction

Past echoes: the Damascene bridal box

In the past, Damascene brides would bring a box with them when they married as part of their trousseaux (*jahāz 'arūs*). Though many examples now rest sedately in Old City emporiums destined for antique exporters and tourists, they may still sometimes be found in private homes, and very occasionally they are still used by the now very elderly bride whom they accompanied. They consist of a top-opening chest, hinged on the long back, which stands 20-40 cm above the floor on inbuilt legs. With the legs, the box may typically stand a metre in height, a metre and a half in width and around 60cm in depth. Many chests are smaller than this and some elaborate ones much larger. The structure is simple and functional. However, these boxes are built most often from a rich walnut timber, carved with delicate geometric and floral motifs and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, sometimes edged with silver or tin for fine definition and then beaded with slivers of ivory, rosewood and ebony. Their opulent, shimmering curlicues are commonly seen alongside similarly decorated furnishings in news footage of diplomatic meetings held in Damascus, whether the rest of the surroundings emulate the past or are slickly 'modern'. Alongside the protagonists, the bridal box becomes a generic item of Damascene craft and beauty, political shorthand for a slew of motifs, narratives and projections about the past and its material solidity.

Meanwhile, in curio shops and storehouses, the bridal boxes line the walls and are stacked on top of each other, reaching to the ceiling like forgotten and dusty coffins. For a passing tourist or collector of Middle Eastern furniture, these boxes are a beautiful and often expensive historical object. To me, they are a poignant reminder of the many brides that have been and gone over the last couple of centuries, of the family groups that have formed and grown, prospered and suffered. The wealthiest homes were elaborately decorated with parquetry and inlaid furniture and in these opulent settings, bridal boxes were among many items of loveliness. For many less wealthy Damascenes, they represented the only piece of free-standing furniture owned. This adds to their poignancy as important historical objects with a story I

wish they could narrate; one centred on their original, almost forgotten function. This solid piece of furniture would store the garments a bride had been given by her own family for married life, to protect her during the different seasons that punctuate Damascene yearly cycles. These varied between individuals but might include her bathing bowl and protection cup if her family could afford them, and items to help her during early motherhood. Regardless of wealth, the most consistent item contained within the box was the bride's shroud, and the oils and unguents necessary to cleanse her body at the time of her death. Thus, even after a long life married into another family, her own kin could not forsake her and provided for her continuing needs. As a material item, the bridal box contained and for me symbolises essential elements of past Damascene marriage, motherhood, life and death; a life-cycle begun not at birth but at marriage.

The ubiquity of bridal boxes in antique shops and storehouses hints at a past importance, yet they are seen in relatively few contemporary homes. During my



The bridal box once gendered personal property... now a museum piece, object of generic political background and expensive commodity antique.

research, I only encountered a couple of women, now elderly, who had received such items personally, although many remembered their mothers' and grandmothers' dusty box of personal possessions. Each belonged very specifically to the bride and with her death, the box's place within the family home became less relevant. To me as an observer the bridal box signifies a form of intimate personal property which materially represents a past that is no longer with us, as both the brides who owned them have gone and the practice has been modified and discarded over the past century.

Present tense: unpacking the box

In a large antiques shop, the back and side walls lined with bridal boxes, the rest of the space filled with ornamental furniture, a group of five mature men sat on a cold January day drinking hot cumin tisane with lemon and salt. Curious about the boxes, I asked them how much they knew about their provenance and after some thought, they admitted 'very little' as the boxes had been bought/reclaimed long before their time in business or transferred on from some other dealers' stock. Instead, they elaborated more generally that things like the box and the trousseaux have always depended on where people are from, distinguishing between Damascus and its hinterlands, some of which are now suburbs of the city where once they were distinct entities. They explained that women in the villages around Damascus did, and sometimes still do, sew their own trousseaux. 'In Damascus this was never common' they told me, pointing out that this would imply a lack of wealth and thus a potential source of bridal family 'shame'. For rich families, they explained, the chest was only a small element of the furniture gift and was sometimes swapped for mother-of-pearl inlaid wardrobes and chests of drawers. They estimated that people had stopped receiving these chests around 50 years or so ago; 'No, before', 'No my aunt had one in the 60s', 'That is 50 years ago, oh *Allah* protect us!'. The past was hard to definitively date and quantify.

Tiring of my questions, this mild bickering slid very quickly into a more impassioned debate whose back story took time to emerge. The proprietor of the antique shop was angry with his nephews Khalid and Amer, they had taken money

from him, telling him they would bring it back with a profit via stock purchase and sale of items including the bridal boxes in Lebanon. They had not yet done this and now Khalid had been seen driving around in a new and expensive car. 'I just won't speak to them until we have organised this', the proprietor said. His companions were conciliatory: 'You'll get your money back, give them time', 'They are young, you don't know what is happening if you do not speak to them', 'They are your nephews, they will come'. The proprietor was not swayed and became more agitated, demanding their sympathy: 'Yes but this is stealing, I lent this money with trust in my heart, why have they not come?' The others coolly told him 'Don't eat them' (*lā tākol-hom (colloq.)*)... straighten your mind'. Eventually the shop owner exploded with righteous indignation 'But it was \$200,000! And I am the master (*ṣāhib*)'. When I looked around, I realised I was the only one visibly surprised by this sum whilst his companions seemed unphased, as if it were a small amount, although even for a wealthy stock owner this was a substantial amount of capital. 'It is their shame', reiterated the proprietor.

The bridal box, its changing currency from natal marriage 'gift' to historical commodity and the sorts of complicated business transactions in which it has later become implicated, illustrates the way that Damascene kinship encompasses shifting and complex trajectories within and beyond static notions of the 'Arab family'. There is more to kinship, memory and personal property than a box or even a stack of beautiful intriguing boxes. For my informants, the bridal box was of little interest, an obsolete practice and a dusty, if attractive, remnant of fast disappearing associations; its specificity and association with individual brides and life-courses often excluding it from broader meta-narratives and rhetoric of the past. However compelling and poetic they may appear, the bridal boxes are my obsession and my manifestation of a wide and complex social life. As an object and an idea the box reappears throughout this thesis, an implicit reminder of past logics of marriage and kinship in Damascus to contrast against the more explicit details offered in narratives. There is so much between birth and death, or for that matter marriage and birth and death, that no box can literally or figuratively represent. Consequently, the challenge this thesis addresses is the relationship between the implicit impressions and the explicit, easily articulated expressions of shifting kinship, social change and temporality.

Kinship beyond the bridal box: why study Time and Generations in Damascus?

One of the central themes of anthropological work on the Middle East is the dynamic of the 'Arab' family (Abu-Lughod 1989; 1990a). Kinship theory on the region largely reiterates the structure and processes of a static or cyclical kinship pattern that has as its cornerstone patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1991). Anthropological work shows how gendered power relations are intrinsically linked with age-specific roles within kin groups, showing and explaining how gender and age interlink to perpetuate the family as a key social structure, layered with power, duty and love (Joseph 1999a). Integral to this theorising is a durational and ultimately repetitive understanding of both kinship mechanisms and kinship's place in Middle Eastern societies.

While anthropological work has focused on kinship, socio-historical literature has often theorised or presumed the importance of generations as a dynamic force shaping Middle Eastern movements towards 'modernisation' (Meijer 2000). Political generations have been highlighted within socio-historical research as highly instrumental in local and regional social, economic and political change (Khalaf 1991; Provence 2005:14). Individual generations are given status as the personification of growing historical forces and tensions, often conceived as reactionary to the stance of an older political generation. Within these analyses of political and social change, a strong emphasis is placed on a lineal model of movement from 'tradition' to 'modernity' and the subsequent tensions of push and pull, action and reaction, or dialectics, that such a lineal model implies (Meijer et al 2000; Schumann 2001).

The underlying theoretical and methodological premise of my research and thesis is that there are two disparate areas of theorising on the Middle East, both with temporality and generation as integral, but largely presumed, elements. One emphasises the continuous cyclical reproduction of the family which implies continuity, and the other stresses generation as a force for change defining past, present and future. All contain and presume a model of the nature of social time and temporal sensibility in the region, either broadly cyclical (reproduction) or lineal (punctuated production). These prompt me to ask within this thesis, what happens

when historical change interacts with generations within the family? How is presumed temporality understood in Damascus when the ‘reproductive’ intersects with the ‘productive’? And to what degree can they be said to represent poles of continuity and change?

To address these questions, I have focused on kinship as the primary site of ‘generation’ and a fundamental locus for perceptions of ‘time’. Consequently, important topics addressed in this thesis such as space, memory, narrative, statecraft and religiosity are considered to be mutually constituted with kinship. For example, as Robertson (1991) points out, the characterisation of social or political generations, sometimes referred to as age-cohorts, within a population is the extending out of a metaphor which is ultimately dependent on kin-defined notions of reproduction and generation (1991:95; 2001:183). In this way a wider discussion of what ‘generations’ might or might not be doing in relation to political and social change benefits from a grounding in the generation and time of kinship (Rugh 1997:15). This does not, however, deny the possibility that social conceptions of generations framed by time, place and events are not also instrumental in shaping ever-emergent kinship (Volk 2001). Interest in and conundrums of generation and reproduction are often integral to social and political decision-making in realms apparently far removed from closed domestic units of kin (see Al-Tawila et al, 2003). Nonetheless, focusing on kinship allows us to place emphasis on the manner in which the lives and activities of those not obviously part of either elite or groundbreaking ‘generations’ also contribute to and generate new forms of social life and politics, instead of being mere flotsam on the epic tides of history. Such a focus takes seriously both indigenous claims about the importance of family (Rugh 1984:1, 32; Lughod 1986:8), and academic assertions that the ‘everyday’ or the household is a site of action with important emic distinctions and boundaries rather than simply a site of reaction to be framed by academic discourse (Jean-Klein 2003; Das 2007; Kelly 2008). It also leads one to ask exactly where and what are the terms and mechanisms of social change and equally importantly those of continuity (Bloch 1996:217)? It is through questions about kinship that we can join the explicit with the implicit, and social practice with structure (Holy 1996:173; Carsten 2000:4-5). Taking my introductory example, how might the implicit notions once contained in an item like the bridal box (the

specificity of the bride, her reproductive potential and her integral relationship to her natal kin) and their subsequent loss as a salient marriage transaction item, conjoin with and connote the generational dynamics of economic exchanges suggested by present tensions (the antiques proprietor and his errant nephews)?

The situating of this research in Damascus rather than any other Middle Eastern locale comes from an intermingling of reported regional differences and similarities within the Middle East and the Levant. While lodging in a Christian village in the Damascene hinterland in order to write-up her material on Egyptian kinship, Rugh (1997) found it hard not to directly compare the kinship she saw around her with that of Egyptian informants and friends she was transcribing into ethnography (1997:49; see also Rugh 1984). Many elements she found regionally recognisable, yet throughout her subsequent ethnographic description of that Syrian family, she also noted unique or distinct practices and attitudes that intrigued her and complicated her personal suppositions of Middle Eastern kinship (1997:35). A



Syria and its capital city Damascus

repetitive theme throughout her Syrian work is the manner in which children are socialised through their siblings and through the generational work of diverse kin which, she suggests, was more evident than during her time in Egypt (1997:55, 230). The experience was profound enough that it caused her to critically examine her own North American assumptions about creating new persons through kinship (1997:239-241). This and other supporting material such as Salamandra's account of Damascene elite (2004) and Wedeen's (1999) and Rabo's (1996) considerations of the intersection of state and kinship in Syria offer ground to suggest that further work is required to move beyond presumed essentialisms of what Syrian kinship might be and consequently what Middle Eastern kinship is and does. English language anthropological literature on Syria and Damascus is sparser than for countries such as Egypt and to a lesser extent its neighbours Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey. Consequently, this thesis seeks to make a small addition to the subtleties of cross-cultural comparison within the regional literature on Middle Eastern kinship from one of its many important urban centres: Damascus.

Damascus and Syria in time: contemporary context and historical themes of generation and social change

As a site for considering generations and time, Damascus is pertinent from the present temporal, demographic and politico-economic context which can be most simply expressed in numbers; during my fieldwork period of autumn 2007 to summer 2009, figures suggest nearly 65% of the Syrian population were under 25 or 70% under 30 (CIA World Fact Book). The population growth rate was 2.4%, a figure that had dropped from its peak of around 3.8% in 1982. Although still high, this rate marked a breaking point on the surging wave of Syrian demographics, with the largest 'generation' of Syrians under the age of 30 since records began in terms of both percentage and absolute number. Furthermore, given the steady drop in birth rates among proportionally the largest generational cohort it may ever have raises the Malthusian spectre of competition for limited resources between and within current social generations (Robertson 2001:160). These population figures draw attention to the interesting question of whether formulations by Mannheim ([1929] 1952) and

Eisenstadt (1956) about the role of political and historical generations and their tensions in terms of ‘conceptualizations of knowledge’ might apply to the Middle East, or whether we require different sociological formulations with which to understand each generation’s place in social change. For Mannheim in particular, social generations are always emergent through notable events and the socio-historical environment that colours their youth. Experiences such as wars or large-scale movement of people through migration and rapid urbanisation, shape ‘conceptualizations of knowledge’ (Mannheim [1929] 1952). Understandings of causality become embodied in the outlooks of social generations, which in turn themselves crystallise the agents of change, giving rise to events that shape further future generations (Riley 1972:7-21; Spencer 1990). Certainly this pattern of instrumental age-cohorts is premised in much of the literature on political and historical change within Syria, as seen in many works’ commanding titles such as Schumann’s ‘The Generation of Broad Expectations: Nationalism, Education and Autobiography in Syria and Lebanon, 1930-1958’. Regardless of whether they focus on the machinations of political elites or populist social movements such as the rise of Ba’athism, several good socio-historical accounts of what is now Syria, often read as roll-calls of political and social generations one after another. Like waves crashing on a beach, significant generations of the 20th century are presented as reacting to the ‘mistakes’ or ‘successes’ of their ‘fathers’ without critically addressing the social specificities of how ‘conceptualisations of knowledge’ take shape within this generational milieu (see Petran 1978; Seale 1986; Khoury 1991; Hinnebusch 1991; Choueiri 2000).

Work on social change directly addressing the thorny issue of the ‘Arab Youth’, over the past thirty years often described as a ‘generation in crisis’, is heavily premised on thwarted generational change (Muñoz 2000; Bennani-Chraïbi 2000). In particular, the juxtaposition of the immediacy of a category like ‘Arab Youth’ conceptualised with the negative descriptor of ‘in crisis’, with its continued use for several decades, raises some interesting questions about time, generations and life-cycles. Is ‘crisis’ an integral artefact of what it is to be ‘Youth’ in a contemporary Middle Eastern context? Do people move in and out of this state of crisis as their life-course progresses? Or do some simply maintain it throughout their

life-course, parallel perhaps to the label '*shabāb*', which though typically meaning 'youth', in certain contexts denotes a generation of Palestinian (primarily) men long after the age-related epithet could otherwise hold (Barber 2002:217; Bucaille 2004; Kelly 2008)? Moreover, as new generations enter the fold, how do they interact with the crises of their predecessors alongside their own? The specifics of how 'conceptualisations of knowledge' and 'generation in crisis' operate beyond the contexts of conflict and victimhood remain hazy (Erlich 2000; Akbar 2003). It is possible to use anthropological considerations of kinship as an avenue for exploring the ways knowledge is constituted between family members within and beyond terms such as 'crisis' (Hockey and James 2003).

Syria is not alone in the region in experiencing this generational cohort peak. The economic, political and social contexts in Syria and Damascus add to the particularities felt by those who live them. As recent protests and regime changes/shifts across the region attest, though sharing some social and generational tensions over the control of politics, resources and governance with its peers, Syria is resolutely following its own trajectory. Prior to and during fieldwork in 2007-2009, Syria had been slowly picking up momentum in its bid towards economic liberalisation. From the mid 1980s onwards, it had moved from a 'closed' but Soviet allied Statist system to one of market socialism (Perthes 1995; Hinnebusch 1995). This resulted in the recent opening of private banks, a stock market and the rolling back of some state provision (Abboud 2009). For my informants, this was often felt through the re-categorisation of commodities in relation to subsidy, along with commodity price-hikes and some increased opportunity for financial services (OBG 2008:42). State driven policies of Pareto-improving liberalisation have been a forum of active internal debate about the dynamics of economy and society in Syria (see Sottimano 2009; Hinnebusch 2009a; Schmidt 2009). The benefits of an increased ability to buy and trade a range of goods on a comparatively open market were frequently extolled by my informants, however such praise was commonly rivalled by complaints about increasing living costs and reduced job security. Media and economic commentaries have explored the potential benefits of emulating Chinese market socialism given the inherent difficulties of the Syrian service sector, which

enjoys a greater percentage of GDP than industry meaning that outside revenue from exports is very limited (Perthes 2004; Arslanian 2009).

A side effect of this liberalisation appeared at the time of fieldwork to be greater discussion and releasing of ‘official figures’ for unemployment to support the progress of this policy, the official line hitherto being that Syria suffered from no unemployment (George 2003:27). Thus Abdullah al-Dardari, Deputy Prime Minister (Economic Affairs) suggested that unemployment had dropped from 12% in 2003 to approximately 8.5% in 2007, but admitted that at least 18% of the population between the ages 18 and 25 were officially recorded as unemployed in 2007 (OBG 2008:18). Given the lack of data collection and ambiguities of categorisation, no statistical demographics of Syria paint a precise or even broadly accurate picture. They do, however, point to state recognition of widespread and ongoing structural problems for this burgeoning population, which can be cast in both generational and class terms (Kabbani and Kamel 2007), reflecting the concerns of my informants. Longstanding and shifting relations between wealthy elites and poorer elements of the population were a topic of day-to-day debate, as signifiers of wealth inequality became increasingly visible.

Since the death of former president Hafiz Asad and succession by his son Bashar Asad in 2000, shifting dynamics between state, economy and populace have been accompanied and driven by rhetoric, and some action, towards combating corruption and increased ‘transparency’ of state and internal market mechanisms (Hinnebusch 2009a:11). This rhetoric has often translated to and been felt as quotidian efforts to enforce or bolster pre-existing laws, such as the wearing of seatbelts in cars and some efforts to overcome small-scale bribery of officials. For my informants, such reforms reflected their disgruntlement with the status quo (‘The problem with Syria is that everyone takes bribes!’) but were nonetheless met with scornful derision (‘These reforms are too many at once!’, ‘This is Syria not Abu Dhabi!’) implying they required a more integrated package of socio-economic and political change. From the President’s office, economic shifts and a move away from institutional ‘corruption’ have been presented as necessary before greater (desired?) political liberalisation could take place (Rubin 2007; Ziadeh 2011). In 2001, following the regime’s apparent move away from the old guard and towards greater

political plurality, the ‘Damascus Spring’ blossomed with unexpected abundance (Perthes 2004a:16). The regime wrestled back control through violent threats and appeals to the basic terms of production and provision epitomised by the slogan ‘Bread before Freedom’ (George 2003).

Retrospectively, claims of political change appear hollow but at the time of fieldwork the regime’s game-plan was ambiguous with a marked shift evident in the modes of engagement between the population and its political elite (Ismail 2009). It has been suggested that this is a generational adjustment, the younger population being more adept at navigating the intricacies of a modern police state (Poujeau forthcoming). Of note is the Syrian state’s facilitating role and diplomatic response to the large influx of Iraqi refugees and UNHCR infrastructure which followed. Importantly these modernising drives were heavily associated with the office of President. Under Hafiz Asad, the role of President was often presented and understood as coterminous with government, state and the Ba’ath party, this wholeness being integral to his stance as a strong and charismatic leader with a host of military ‘distinctions’ as a form of political legitimating (Seale 1988; Wedeen



‘I believe in Syria’. President Bashar Asad’s campaign poster dominates the billboard between the Citadel and the entrance to the sūq al-Ḥamadiyya, the primary entrance to the Old City. In front, the congested traffic of Ba’athist sharia al-Thawra (Victory Street) bisects the Old City and its earlier connection to the administrative an-Nāsa district of the New City.

1999). The decade since his death saw a subtle shift in emphasis with the new incumbent President Bashar Asad portrayed as slightly separate from state and regime mechanisms and acting to modernise an overly bureaucratic state system along with the reforming help of his ‘sophisticated’ wife Asma.

Syria and particularly Damascus represent a nexus of Muslim, Arab and regional identity (Rubin 2007). The Syrian capital is the centre of an area still known regionally as *bilād ash-Sha’m*, as much a conceptual title for a flexible area of Damascus and her environs *or* a greater Levantine unity, as it is a simple description of people and place (Salameh 2010). With its strong claim to being the oldest continuously inhabited location in the world, Damascus and the coastal region of the Levant have been engaged in constant statecraft, albeit in varied form, for the last 10,000 years (Devlin 1983:6). Yet the modern nation-state of Syria is a contrastingly recent construct, having gained independence in 1946 (Thompson 2000). The preceding period had been marked by frequent changes of both governance and administrative boundaries. Following the Arab revolt of 1916, and the disassembling of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, the Hashemite Syrian Kingdom was briefly formed under Emir Faisal encompassing parts of modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, southern Turkey, Israel and the Palestinian territories (Provence 2005). In 1921, following French bombardment of Damascus and capture of the wider polity of ‘Greater Syria’, Faisal was expelled and a French Mandate governed, importantly partitioning the coastal province of Lebanon (Ma’oz 1973; Khoury 1987). The length of recorded past and continuously contracting and expanding influence of Damascus as the centre of a Syrian polity makes a history of the region both long and oblique. Of relevance to its contemporary placement as a Ba’athist state in the region are the ongoing tensions both among the elite, and between the elite and populace. Consequently, politics enacted through accommodation and tension between social classes and social generations have been interpreted as corollaries of each other (Batatu 1981, 1999; Hinnebusch 1989). During the 19th century, through patterns of strategic intermarriage between army, religious and wealthy leaders (Khoury 1991:17) and Ottoman property-tax reforms (Karpas 1968:86) the elite had consolidated in an alignment of Sunni Islam, pedigree and vast landownership across the Levant (Khoury 1983:26). With their interests spreading so

far across the region in large landholding estates which crossed what are now national borders, the older elite lost political ground before and after independence through their failure 'to wed nationalism to state power' (Khoury 1991:26). However, this 'politics of the notables' (Hourani 1968:68) still has its contemporary equivalents, as newer elites created through Ba'athism and wealth strategically marry Damascene families of repute to their mutual benefit (Salamandra 2004:70).

Under the French mandate, bureaucratic and military reforms heralded a new upwardly mobile social class of diverse sectarian and social backgrounds, but little was accomplished by way of breaking the financial and political dominance of the urban absentee landlords of Damascus (Thompson 2000). Following the creation of a full independent state of Syria in 1946, the country was politically dominated by a series of coups, primarily originating from Nationalists with competing visions of a Syrian nation-state (Choueiri 2000). It was not, however, until 1958 and the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Shukri al-Quwatli's democratically elected Ba'ath government of Syria and Gamal Abdul Nasser's Egypt, that major socio-political shifts can be clearly identified. Despite seceding from the union in 1961, followed by a Ba'athist coup and establishment of an effective junta in 1963, this period constituted the most decisive reshaping of socio-economic and demographic conditions in Syria (Hinnebusch 1989). Estates were dismantled and large-scale, long-term physical and social engineering projects enacted. Together, these led to the creation and redistribution of arable land among some of the estimated 70% of the population who were previously landless peasantry working as sharecroppers (Warriner 1957). This ultimately encouraged greater social mobility, including among minority groups such as the heterodox Alawi in the northern coastal area of Syria from which Hafiz Asad emerged. A prominent military leader in the 1967 Six-Day-War with Israel, he eventually overthrew the incumbent Ba'ath regime in 1970 in a coup euphemistically known as the 'corrective movement' (Heydenann 1999).

At the time of fieldwork, the ideals of a pan-Arab, secular and socialist Ba'athism, meaning 'renaissance', maintained currency in the political discussions of my Damascene informants. Many of these had benefited from these modernising

reforms through higher education, army careers and increased quality of life, despite evident disillusionment with the regime's modes of operation.

Damascus commands political leverage internally and within the region due to its staunch and longstanding opposition to its neighbour Israel and especially Israel's claims to the water-rich and largely UN-administered Golan Heights. Under father and son, the Ba'athist regime's hostility to Israel has remained the bedrock of their international policy (Ziadeh 2011:78). It offers the most extensive reason for their internal popular support and most decisive 'legitimizing' of their infringement of constitutional terms and violation of human rights. The constant 'State of Emergency' since 1963, reiterated after the October war in 1973, has been cited as the primary repressive law, leading to thousands of human rights violations (Syrian Human Rights Committee). However, following its rescindment on the 21st April 2011 (subsequent to my fieldwork), evidence suggests that its practical importance was overemphasised. Rather, the ongoing threat from Israel and other perceived external forces coupled with the sheer extent of the military, maintained a pattern of widespread censorship, along with gross and mundane acts of violence, political oppression and administrative privileging (Cooke 2007). During fieldwork, many areas of political and social control were open topics of lively debate among Ba'ath supporters and opponents alike but two areas of criticism were invariably out of bounds: the President and foreign policy towards Israel.

As a nation-state Syria had, until recently, successfully negotiated a tightrope between its myriad of ethnic, religious and secularist factions to maintain relative internal peace (Antoun 1991; Sadowski 2002). On this score, favourable comparisons have often been made between Syria and the explosive politics of its neighbour and sometime client state Lebanon, who finally succeeded in officially shrugging off the heavy steering hand of Damascus during my fieldwork period (Salameh 2010). However, what is sometimes referred to in Syria as 'the civil war' in 1982, where an uprising in the city of Hama was quashed with brutal force resulting in large loss of civilian life both Muslim and Christian, and the regime's subsequent capitulation and accommodation of Islamist politics, speaks to the problems of asserting the regime's success and that divisions exist down sectarian lines (Seale 1989:328; Van Dam 1996:142-143). Simultaneously, some have argued

that a certain amount of displacement of tensions has occurred through Damascus seeing Beirut as an adjunct to its national politicking (Shalaq 1993).

Syria is not totally unique regionally in any one respect of its geological, ethnic, sectarian and political diversity, but coupled with Syria's comparative success at redistributive policy over the past sixty years, allowing it until recently to avoid some of the evident wealth inequality seen in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, it has maintained a social and imaginative status that extends beyond its economic limitations. In a word Syria and Damascus have had 'gravitas' and remain pivotal within the region both politically and socially.

This broad stroke impression of a country that has until recently balanced its internal complexity is not to deny Syria's evident problems and difficulties, which at the time of writing are engulfing the nation. Syria and Damascus are also places where interesting centripetal and centrifugal forces are at play in relation to Arab/Muslim identity. Tension has continuously existed between religious groups and the regime's largely secular elite, while small pockets of liberal, leftist and religious defiance often oppose the politics of an insidious elite conspicuously lining its pockets (Cooke 2007; Pace and Landis 2009). Moreover, while defiance of Israel has been the regime's political trump card, its longstanding apparent unconcern regarding international opinion has for decades made travel, trade and access to social mobility problematic for all but the wealthiest of Syrians (See Kienle et al. 1994).

Contexts of political placement, class and marginality: the Sunni Muslim majority

The material presented in this thesis focuses on the lives of families from the primarily conservative Sunni Muslim, middle- and working-classes living in and networking between several of Damascus' suburban districts. My primary base was the higher reaches of Muhajareen where I lived with a family for six months, and the neighbouring mountainside districts of Sheikh Mehia ad-deen and especially Rukn ad-deen. However, the networks and chances of field experience also took me to families in socio-economically mixed neighbourhoods and growing residential



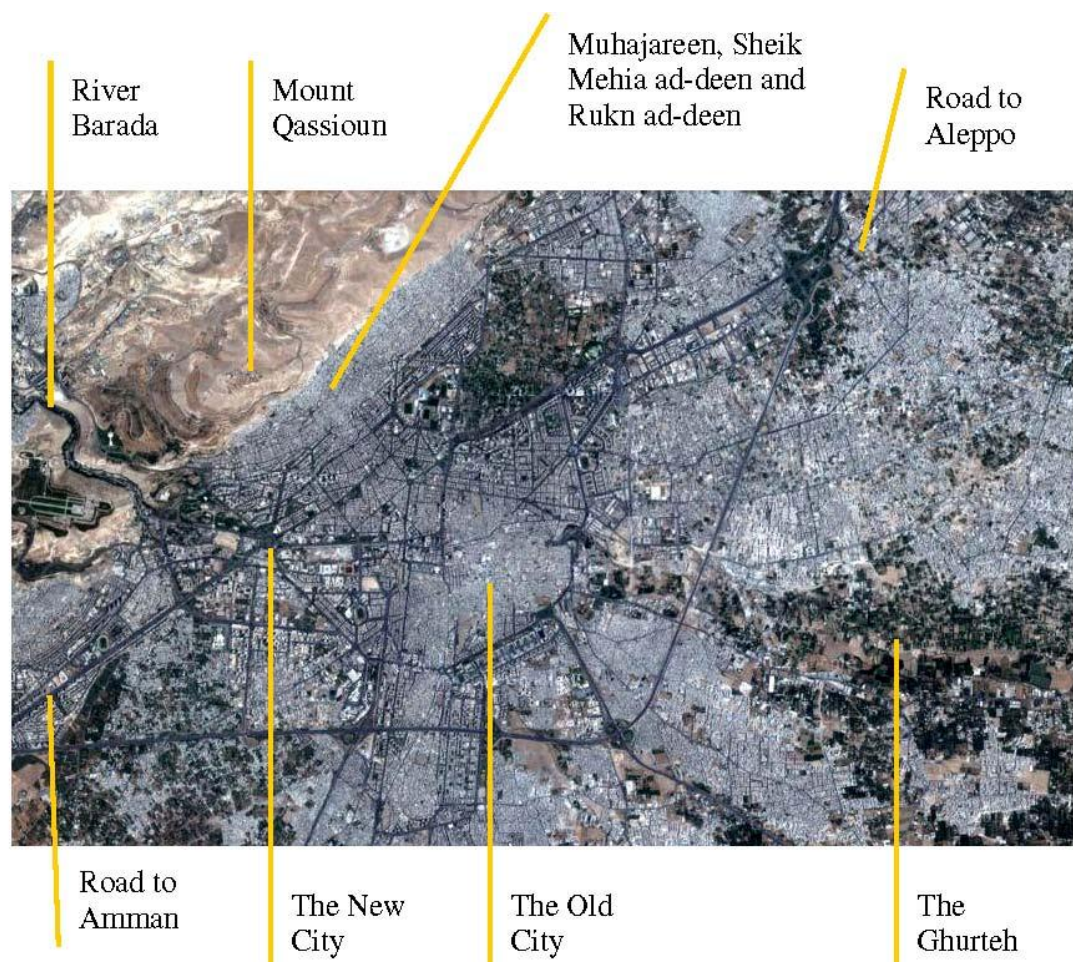
A view of Mount Qassioun from Sahat an-Nijmeh. On the top is a military instillation, below runs the road and the mountainside districts, left to right, of Muhajareen, Sheik Mehia ad-deen and Rukn ad-deen.

conurbations that surround the city such as Sidi Maqdad, Al Hajar Al Aswad, Kafr Batna, Darayya, Harasta and Duma. These families represent the vast majority of the population of Damascus and as such it is the explication of these families' self-portrayal as residents of the city I am most interested in. But to understand this apparently diffuse field-site, it is necessary to understand the rapid expansion of the city over the last century. Over this period, Damascus has swollen from under 200,000 to a population of 2.5 million with as much as a third of Syria's 21 million living within its wider administrative district (CIA World Fact Book). Consequently, the city is metropolitan containing diverse and continually shifting communities which reside in and between neighbourhoods, whose members cannot be defined exclusively by place of residence. Instead, I define my field-site in relation to the well documented spatialisation of administration and the elite.

A common leisure activity in Damascus, enjoyed by the spectrum of Damascene residents and visitors, is to bask in the spectacular views of Damascus from the high road that runs along the side of Mount Qassion. Enjoying a picnic or sharing a smoking pipe, below, Damascus sprawls across the fertile plain where the river Barada descends from the anti-Lebanon and quenches the arid plains. Glinting in the sunlight, the eye is drawn to the Umayyad Mosque which embodies much of the region's history and is now a well-used connection with the ingenuity of early Islam (Burns 1999:79). The mosque sits nestled in the remains of the walled Old

City, evident by the low rise *sūqs* and courtyard houses (*beit ‘arabī*) which surround it. In the past, these walls contained the grand abodes of rich Damascene landowners, as well as their more humble counterparts. Now the Old City is dwarfed by urban sprawl and a change in domestic dwelling away from these *beit ‘arabī* to ‘modern’ style apartments contouring the skyline as far as the eye can see.

By the early 20th century the fertile plain and flanks of mount Qassioun were already populated with ancient satellite settlements such as Salahyie, Sheikh Mehia ad-deen and al-Maydan. Ottoman administration and infrastructure had developed along the Barada River, with a public garden and court house just west of the Old City walls marking the centre of the ‘New City’. The later addition of As-Shohada’e Square (between 1895 and 1914) not only created the node of the modern city’s telegraph and tramway lines but also represented a transition from the established



Damascus from above shows the contrast between tightly woven low-rise buildings in the Old City and marginal neighbourhoods with the large boulevards and distinct apartment blocks of the wealthy and new.

forms of narrow streets, house and *ḥāra* (gated neighbourhood) politics and regulation, to the open demarcation of explicit governance (Thompson 2000:174-178). Yet many of the less wealthy inhabitants live along contemporary narrow and ramshackle streets with no names and in houses without numbers which emulate the Old City's forms and resist a certain amount of explicit state presence.

Evident from the lofty eyrie on Mount Qassioun are wide boulevards, radiating out from this 'New City', bounded parks and monumental roundabouts marking rupture from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' (AlSayyad 1992). Although French urban planning followed Ottoman precedents, it produced distinctively colonial social effects with contemporary resonance (Salamandra 2004; Thompson 2000). French efforts to expand the new civic centres and build new quarters external to the Old City led to a spatial polarisation of the 'modern' and 'traditional' city which has since been augmented by Ba'athist road planning. Where orchards with slowly expanding villages had been, new leafy boulevards with French colonial apartment blocks spread like a fan up the gentle flank of Mount Qassioun in the Salihiyya district, with new areas such as Abu Roumana, Maliki, Afeef, Italiani and al-Mazrah joining the space between the satellite mountainside districts. These new fashionable European suburbs boasted modern amenities that attracted the elite and 'progressive' to the new districts, which still remain the privilege of the wealthy and the mark of aspirational fantasy (Salamandra 2004). Although maintaining possession of their opulent Damascene *beit 'arabī*, the move to apartments and (for the very rich) private villas and watered compounds in the arid hills, defines the domestic and social change of the elite and much commentary on the nature of Damascene change.

For the less wealthy and rural or regional immigrant population on whom I focused my research, the transition to apartment living was either slower or more often quite a different process to that of the wealthy. New illegal buildings on the mountainside and plain orchard areas often replicated the older courtyard layout but in concrete rather than wood and adobe. Many of my informants occupied these modest courtyard spaces, whole family units in one or two rooms; others lived in the footprint of lower-rise houses which had been extended vertically or completely built over, especially in the last 30 years as population pressure has mounted. That my



A slice of Damascus from Mount Qassioun (indicated on the map of Damascus from above). Golden light catches the Umayyad mosque in the centre of the Old City. Behind, suburbs and the dark green of the arable-orchard Ghūta. Beyond, the Barada's irrigation where it dissipates into the desert the lights of the airport can be discerned. Contrasting with the Umayyad mosque are the newer concrete multistoreys of government offices, hospitals and hotels.



On the mountainside, streets become increasingly dilapidated and hard to access as the gradient steepens and densely populated illegal settlement dominates.

informants were resident in Damascus meant that they were unlikely to suffer the sorts of destitution and absolute poverty which constitutes approximately 10% of the Syrian population overall (OBG 2008:18). Regardless of whether they and their

families had been living long term in, or were recent migrants or returnees to Damascus, in order to afford the rents and costs of living in the capital, they needed some family personnel with moderate income. In this way, my informants ranged from those I would describe as comfortably middle-class living, for example, on the lower edges of Muhajareen abutting the premium districts of Afeef and Salahiyya, to those whose socio-economic position contained jeopardy and distinct hardship such as those living in small one room apartments or shared houses built of unfinished breezeblock, in areas ill-provided of transport, water and refuse services.

While admiring the city from Mount Qassioun, its residents are only too aware of the distinctions based on origins (Damascene or immigrant), residential district (wealth and religiosity) and employment (military or civil). However, this view from above also clarifies the sense of 'ownership' so often expressed by the city's residents regardless of background. As they outline networks of family, friends and employment amongst the districts below it is possible to share at least the illusion of the city's wholeness, rather than just a plastering together of disparate neighbourhoods broadly defined by wealth and background. Categorising the population in terms of class is problematic (Salamandra 2004; Ismail 2009). In Syria, the military bureaucracy makes ascribing classic Marxist categories of class relations to modes of production and consumption very hard (Bill 1972; Hinnebusch 1991). Wealth positioning is always relative and harder to directly compare in a large and diverse population; nearly everyone believes 'others' to be more prosperous. Similarly, labels such as social conservatism, religious, secular, traditional and modern can be more misleading than useful as descriptive social categories.

Among those I spent time with, security was associated either with men working as career army officers and women in state administration, or being in a position to use family funds to invest in and operate a small business. Working as an army officer, for example, might not ensure a large income but was associated with various perks such as access to free leisure facilities and preferential loans with which to buy a car and visibly improve a family's quality of life. Many of the families I spent time with were more financially restricted than this or like the family I lived with, had seen their fortunes deteriorate. Despite often having long-established family roots in the districts, these less fortunate families could not hope

to earn over 10,000 SYP a month (around 150-170 USD at the time of research and the mark of baseline government wage in Damascus) to support an average household of six, even when extra income is taken into account. In these families, men were often hesitant to discuss their work, the occupational profile ranging from construction labourers, semi-skilled technicians, shop workers, street cleaners and drivers. Many were earning income from multiple sources and importantly, educational attainment often did not correspond to current occupation. Consequently, it was common for nearly two thirds of their income to be used for rent, leaving little spending or saving power for a 'typical' married couple with a young family of three or four children and sometimes other dependents.

In this context, I would suggest that the problematic term 'working class' can be used as indicative of families who must use the labour of wives and daughters regularly to supplement their income in order to rent, clothe and eat. Given that active effort is made to keep married women, especially with children, out of the workforce I interpreted this as signalling that no other option was available to maintain subsistence at the time (Fernea 1985; Moghadam 1998). Such women's work often entailed piece work sewing, arduously carrying the shopping up the mountainside for wealthier neighbours, childminding and the taking in of unmarried female lodgers despite very limited domestic space. Other women worked more formally as teachers and as cleaners in women-only spaces such as beauty parlours or in family concerns, especially as seamstresses. The woman I lived with was well-educated and so supplemented remittances from her ex-husband and gifts from her family with tuition for children struggling at school or with disabilities.

To define most of my informants as conservative Sunni Muslim is to highlight that their faith was an integral and primary source of identity, which to some extent shaped their daily lives. I use the word conservative to delineate them from their more secular Sunni Muslim counterparts as well as radical and 'conservative' Islamism toward which they were largely ambivalent. 'Conservative' in this context I take to denote the care taken to prevent the loss of or to regain the primacy of a Muslim faith and the teachings of Islam in day-to-day and familial decision making; extended to other fields of life such as their attitudes towards politics (Pierret 2009:82). Unlike many discussions of resurgent Islam in the Middle

East (Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2006; Shielke 2010; Bille 2010), elements of Sufism and a proud emphasis on female family members who were Christian or *shi'a* was often an integral part of contemporary Muslim identity I encountered in Damascus (see Böttcher 2002; Stenberg 2005). This still contained a spectrum of outlooks; many whom I would characterise as conservative would find 'extreme' the attitudes of other informants. Similarly, many women who covered to varying degrees would light-heartedly refer to themselves or their compatriots as 'Ninjas' when covered from head-to-toe in black, highlighting the inter-subjectivity of their self-perception. Any categories of religiosity were always relative and under negotiation.

This stratum of less wealthy Damascene society is comparatively marginal in the English language academic literature despite its dominance in numbers and the worry it evokes from more secular elements of the body politic (Ghazzal, Dupret and Belhadj 2009). Matters of money and faith were expressed as combining to create their marginality to, but not total exclusion from, networks of state power. The particularities of family-individual-state interaction often placed them in fear for their safety. The sporadic presence of armed units in the winding small streets, ostensibly to crack down on unregistered street trading, made palpable these sentiments of marginality. This contrasted with the continuous low-level presence of security officers in wealthier districts, dealt with through confident handling and pulling of rank by the more assured middle-class or elite inhabitants. Class and spatial contingencies show that assertions of both the inseparability of state and people in Syria (Reedy 2006) and the overstatement of the 'Arab' state as the exclusive all-encompassing apparatus of Syrian life (Ayubi 1995) are not mutually exclusive.

At the time of fieldwork, many of my informants were not in a financial or social position to be fully absorbed into the state apparatus either through employment or family connections to those with political power. Consequently, they were largely marginal to systems of corruption, nepotism and influence and unlike the wealthier Syrians often represented in the literature, they could not easily be described as one and the same with state apparatus. However, greater integration was always on the horizon in the form of possible state employment and through their

own networks and modes of comportment which were instrumental to their navigation of the city. They might traverse through wealthy residential and commercial centres for work, to buy clothes or to enjoy a favourite park or treat of ice cream. In the *sūqs* as well as the local shops which peppered every neighbourhood they combined purchase of subsidised items from the government store using tokens, with visits to a shop containing the highest quality of this or that product or one owned by a relative/friend bound to give them a good price (Honeysett 2011). As they navigated the city, they stopped to pray in mosques for reasons of convenience or religious preference, they made and affirmed networks and often thrilled in the people they met and sights, sounds, tastes and smells they experienced.



Damascenes, wealthy and poor traverse the city for work, to visit friends and family and to purchase goods for expediency and pleasure.

Focus & argument

The overview of Syrian and Damascene social, political and economic change presented thus far suggests grounds for specific generational tensions and ‘conceptualizations of knowledge’ (Mannheim [1929] 1952; Erlich 2000). Its long history set against recent constellations of dramatic urbanisation, class mobilisation, religious resurgence and politics of a police state together point to scales of change and generation within and beyond an individual’s lifespan. Combining the contexts of Syrian politics and demography galvanises my anthropological kinship interests into a set of broad questions. How are individual’s life-cycles within their family affected by wider ‘generational’ social and political movements? And conversely how do movements through the life-cycle impact on widespread generational movements with age-cohorts in society and politics? Or to put it another way, how much are the choices and attitudes of people defined by their historical context and how much by their role or life-stage at any given point? These are broad questions about change and continuity in human society. In Damascus, they speak to continuously shifting tides, currents and eddies of social and religious politicisation and radicalisation, and the challenges of a swiftly changing economic landscape.

My questions address processes which extend into divergent planes of past and future; they ask about the extent to which persons in Damascus are products of their position within their own-life cycles. Has someone in the later stages of their life always acted and viewed things the way they do now? Will someone in the earlier stages of their life continue to think and do as they do now? Or will they move closer to the acts and thoughts of someone who is now older as they age themselves?

Answering these questions entails two related approaches to kinship and time that can be characterised as diachronic concerns with transformations in social structures and synchronic concerns with perceptions of time and the patterned ways of experiencing and understanding history, in short ‘historicity’ (Koselleck ([1979] 1985:9). The first approach and its question about the interlocking of life-cycles through time and possible social change is the background of this research, for which this thesis can only be a fragment of material and offer tentative suggestions. The second approach and its questions about the manner in which individuals at a specific

point in their life-course relate to past and potential selves, with regard to significant people and situations they identify is the foreground of this thesis.

Based on my fieldwork, I argue that in Damascus perceptions of time and its passing are mediated by shorter- and longer-term concerns that differently emphasise the links between past, present and future. The way time is understood, the modes it inhabits, its boundaries and the relationship my informants have with time cumulatively point towards temporality. The variety of temporal scales, such as long and short term, and registers, such as daily life punctuated by meals or calls to prayer, are lived and articulated through what I term 'temporal-generational dispositions' manifested at specific points in the life-course. From these dispositions and the experience they imply, memories and their plot-giving narratives interweave with broader historical and social narratives about the past. They are, I argue, interpretive reconstructions that bear the imprint of my Damascene informants' assumptions about the place and potentiality of 'experience' and the temporality of social transformation. Their telling and use employ kinship-specific forms of inter-subjectivity and personification, such as grandmother-mother-daughter. Through specific relationships, warning, moral and alternative frameworks are conveyed.

The multiplicity of temporal-generational dispositions within a family, I suggest, offers a continually changing framework of 'experience' and opinion. Consequently processes of inter-subjectivity and hierarchy, as contained by models of patriarchy, illustrate more than a recycling or repetition of persons into fixed roles and statuses. Instead, the layering of memory and hope, mediated by narrative and sensual forms, offers an historical and historicising process of kinship (re)production, through transformative exchange and reciprocity. This leads me to conclude that the time, generation and history of Damascene informants is an emergent property of inter- and intra- generational dynamics within a kinship system, which is integral to shaping social transformation.

Structure of thesis & summary of chapters: the constellations of Kinship, Time & Generation

This thesis is divided into seven principal ethnographic chapters. Within the arc of the material presented, I discuss an array of temporal and generational scales which follow the priorities and interests of my informants. I begin the thesis with the fine grain of individuals within a familial context. Chapter 1 presents a collection of family photographs which introduce Syrian social and historical change, as depicted in their images and through the narratives told around them by various family members, such as changing moral frameworks and the gendered politics of revealing and concealing through attire and image. I explore how, by ordering and making sense of wider national changes, family members insert their own biographical narratives into historical and historicising frameworks. The personal decisions made between family members, which the photographs offer reminders of, reveal how this family has actively been part of the social changes which contextualise the biographical narratives they offer. To consider how the past is utilised in practices of family memory, informing decisions about the present and the future, I explore the concerns of mortality, morality and relatedness within the ethnographic contexts of the destruction of photographic images and successive mother-child relationships. This chapter deals with the ongoing process of inscription, editing, healing and guardianship of memory which characterises the relationships between familial generations.

Chapter 2 details the intricate practices of selection, negotiation, ceremony and exchange which characterise the process of marriage in Damascus. In this chapter I consider the challenges and concerns expressed by informants over becoming married as indicative of the importance of inter-generational kinship activity. I compare a successful courtship and marriage with one which never reached the point of marriage. I explore the processes taken by these couples and their families in order to detail the constraints on my informants, and the ways in which these were overcome. This leads me to emphasise the work which goes into negotiations and facilitation by an array of family members who span age generations.

Chapter 3 compares two exchanges which illustrate changing Damascene marital practices. The ever-shifting prestation given to a bride by the groom, the *mahr*, is compared with the now much-altered prestation given to a bride by her parents, the bridal box, to show how choices and bequests of a previous generation create a framework of possibility for following generations. I present narratives about the *mahr*, the bridal box and marriage which compare past and present, offering both a description of and moral commentary on changing social practices of conjugality.

In chapter 4 I explore ethnography which draws attention to the sensual and memorial place of the home and practices of preparing and sharing food. I consider the qualities of houses and foods, such as pickles, which allow my informants to maintain closeness of kin and integrity of household through and beyond the materiality of houses. The labour and work of household is given as an example of daily life which combines men and women, young and old and stresses the importance of household integrity and place in wider Damascene sociality across the generations.

Chapter 5 addresses the topic of inheritance and utilisation of property such as land and houses. By detailing the interplay between male and female property rights, obligations and forms of transmission I illustrate the importance of corporate groups of siblings and paternal cousins. Presented are examples of the machinations of property transference between familial generation groups. This highlights the manner in which corporate property-owning or business operating groups, though dominated by male agnates, are also mediated by female kin of the same generation. I suggest that within the context of shifting legal and state criteria, persons, families and the state each model distinct but related ways of utilising investments and making social change happen.

Chapter 6 addresses names and naming practices within families, and in relation to state categorisation and control of people and places. By listing the different forms of naming and their meanings I consider how names contain facets of both immutability and changeability through the intergenerational crafting of kin personas. Through comparing the state's synoptic use of naming with the daily use of

moral commentaries on naming, I consider how my informants have expansive maps of relatedness they can utilise to navigate the state bureaucracy.

In chapter 7, ethnographic examples are presented which deal with the ways my informants, especially young adults, confront explicit concerns about the future and enable their hopes through and beyond family networks. I discuss practices such as religious phrasal utterances and ‘pious’ self-making through their choices and through participation in religious groups. In particular I consider my informants’ concerns about mortality in relation to their aspirations regarding future social status, marriage and children. This leads me to argue that pious self-making needs always to be seen in the context of familial and social generations.

Chapter 8 presents my methodological approach towards time, generation and kinship in Damascus. I present the considerations taken, which link theory and methods through the evolution of questions arising from previous fieldwork alongside existing literature on the region. I discuss my ethnographic approach to participant observation, collection of life stories and archival research. I summarise how I inserted myself into the field site and came to understand the social positions of my informants. This is followed by a discussion of how my ethnographic practice and analysis has been shaped by the practical and theoretical insights of previous authors on the region and beyond. I pay particular attention to the challenge of understanding the effects of long-term social change through the short-term lens of ethnographic fieldwork, and how processes of aging and the life-course are understood as integral to my consideration of time. I emphasise the problematic concept of ‘generation’ as being a neglected but useful place to consider how perceptions of the past and hopes for the future interlock with the family. I consider how literature on memory, historicisation and narratives gives guidance to understand the data presented in this thesis, and how approaches towards the material past and its sensual qualities help a kinship- and time-focused consideration of my Damascene ethnography.

Finally I conclude by arguing, from my Damascene ethnography, that my informants employ an array of longer- and shorter-term models of time and understandings of ‘generation’. Comparison between these models allows them to negotiate the complicated elements of Damascene family life. This underscores the

importance of understanding the points where generational relationships are realised within the family, in order to comprehend the terms of wider generational shifts in Damascene society. The mediations of multiple familial generations, and their differing perspectives towards birth and death, offer a plurality of interpretations of the past, and of choices regarding the future. I identify the plurality contained within the familial as central to the historical and historicising processes which emphasise the difference between the young and the old, the living and the dead, the past and the present.

Chapter 1.

Photographs in Time: Curating Incarnations

The ethnographic image: an extended 'snap-shot'

In a small courtyard surrounded by crumbling concrete and mud walls sits a bent figure on a step, swathed in black. She is weeping bitterly in the sodium light that seeps through a canopy of bare branches from a gnarled fig tree. Through her tears she takes a plastic lighter and burns one by one a selection of photographs. Each image crinkles and bubbles, quickly becoming ash that falls like morbid confetti until it blends with the cement step. As all but one of the photographs are obliterated, her crying subsides.

The burning images were a jumbled collection of black-and-white and colour family photographs, haphazardly archived over the last 80 years. A lone photograph from the 1920s shows a baleful collection of children surrounding their parents. The mother sits demurely, her hair in a fashionable, angular bob. Many depict scenes from the 1950s onwards. Adolescents stand in stiff but giggly lines, their pretty dresses and starched shirts glowing in a sun-drenched garden or on a roof terrace with views over the crisp new apartment blocks of a modern, monochrome world... A young couple sit demurely on a bed holding hands, their eyes bright and their smiles coy as they try to hide their happiness... A matt silverscape of teenage girls and boys arrayed on a bench stare intently out of the picture, its darker edges betraying a past in a displayed frame. Later photographs are in glowing colours, showing family celebrations and holidays. A mother and her children sit in the shade of blossoming apricot and almond trees enjoying a picnic... A party at home with a spread of food and family dancing, an electric light prisms in the glossy image... A dapper gentleman in a grey suit rests his hand gently around the waist of a teenage girl whose cheeks are as aglow as her pink frock at a dancing competition... Organised lines of children on the beach, their swimsuits saturated blobs of primary colour... The family on a boat, their hair swept in a sea breeze so that only the toothy grins of children and teenagers can be seen of their faces... Three young women in neat

1980s suits with pencil skirts, heels and candyfloss hair to match... all these are no more.

I know these photographs because each one was explained to me in detail as I drank in their images and printed them on my retina. I squirreled away their details and textures in my memory, reinforced with hastily scribbled field-notes and sketches. The woman portrayed above is the woman I lived with. Her name is Mawiyah. The lone photograph from the late 1920s depicts Mawiyah's maternal family, settled in Ramallah, Palestine, her mother as a small baby. The later black-and-white images show a period of happy prosperity in the 1950s, of sisters and brothers all marrying in their turn. The couple on the bed are Mawiyah's mother and father on their engagement. The garden and roof terrace are two homes of an extended family in the town of Duuma that nestles in the arid mountains just outside of Damascus. They show picnics in the family's orchard in the Ghurteh, Damascus' green-belt of farmland, orchards and gardens. They show a wedding anniversary, organised and cooked by an adolescent Mawiyah for her parents. 'I cooked it all!' she explained to me with pride. The couple dancing are father and daughter, entering a dancing competition together. More colour photographs are later; they show Mawiyah's siblings and her mother at holiday resorts in Latakia and Tartus on the Mediterranean coast in the 1970s and 80s. Mawiyah herself is present in some, but in others she is conspicuously absent. The three young women are Mawiyah with two sisters at the beginning of their working lives, who used to swap clothes so it appeared they had more 'European style' twin sets and trouser suits for their work. All these family photographs are burnt, the images they contained possibly gone forever. Except one. One photograph remained, showing Mawiyah with her head thrown back in laughter, her black hair caught in motion flicking out as she sits on the shoulders of her also laughing favourite brother. This picture is effervescent with a moment in life captured. The un-posed spontaneity means the sound of her shrieking 'eeeeh' at the thrill and fear of being lifted so high echoes through time. This picture she could not burn in that moment.

Camera, Obscurer

By discussing the narratives that the images held for Mawiyah and her family and the photographs' direct indexicality, by which I mean how they refer directly to a particular state of affairs such as who is included in the images, this chapter will make clear why they were destroyed. The act of their destruction was a moment of family trauma which marked a point in a longer-running context of choices and pressures, themselves preceded and shaped by other points of change, some far-reaching and positive, others biographically traumatic. Added to this are considerations not only of Damascene family historicisation but also the apparent intersection of religious faith and understandings of God's perception of temporality. I delve into sensitive memories in order to understand the constitution of some interesting Damascene temporalities.

Within this chapter I explore both the photographs themselves and their destruction to illustrate an intimate family history that precedes the event of their burning. The act of physical destruction makes boldly apparent that the images held by these small cards of photographic paper were potent. The effects they might conceivably cause were deeply personal to their owner(s) and those whose image was contained within them. This palpability chimes with Barthes' (1981) assertion of the tension between the *studium* and the *punctum* of a photographic image. As Barthes points out, there are coded, stylistic elements of photographs which imbue generic meaning (the family group, the brushed hair, the desirable background) which make the *studium* of these Middle Eastern photographs. Moreover, for my informants, the *studium* is indissoluble *and* disrupted by the presence of people and memory filling the image and giving it meaning to the (knowing) gazer which Barthes identifies as the *punctum*. Like Barthes, Mawiyah and her family had concerns about the photographic image and its potential for damage, the way the *punctum* 'rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces me' (1981:26); the association of photographs and mortality. However, the pattern of causality they ascribed and the emphasis they placed on photographic agency as evidence was subtly different. When I questioned Mawiyah, unable to prevent myself from entreating if she did not want to save them as memory for her children, she

gently derided me, touching her head and saying ‘all the memories are in here’. No photos extant or deceased had the potency to change what she knew; her concern was focused on the knowledge of others, actively cutting networks with the past and fulfilling her mother’s wish they be destroyed.

The spectral alterity of the photographic image that so allures and frightens Barthes seems harnessed here for more instrumental means than the imminence of mortality alone. It also disputes Bourdieu’s (1990) assertion that ‘the photograph itself is usually nothing but the group’s image of its own integration’ (1990:26). The temporality of death and eschatology disrupt the idea that family photography *only* shows family groups bound together. In this way, the processes of destruction in relation to mortality also share elements of Sontag’s (1977) assertions of photography being both symptomatic and active in processes of social change. For Sontag, family photography reflects a social transformation whereby smaller family units are carved out of much larger aggregates, which requires careful management of the depiction of family networks (1977:8). Rather than reconstituting the reduced family, as Bouquet (2001) points out, in the world of family snaps, kinship can be complex without being nostalgic (2001:86). In Damascus the relationships individuals and families have to past selves, biographies and the reminders they have of them, are manifold and both positive and negative.

The photos’ images and their effects can also be read as a comment on Syrian social history, as evidence of the passing of time in a specific socio-political context and the changes or continuities wrought therein. It is this connection between kinship and history or rather historicisation I wish to bring to the fore. In her seminal work on Middle Eastern ‘relationality’ and practices of selving within the family, Joseph (1999) posits a model of connectivity whereby ‘person’s boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others’ (1999a:12) with particular reference to kinship relations of nurture such as mother-son and brother-sister. Integral to her understanding of this connectivity is selving as processual and historically constituted, in which selves are ‘woven through intimate relationships that are lifelong, which transform over the course of personal and social history and which shape and are shaped by shifts and changes of the self’ (1999a:2). As suggested by terms such as relationality and ‘patriarchal connectivity’, Joseph’s

theorising about selfhood through family and over time is focused towards forms of socialisation which ‘value linkage, bonding and sociability’ (1999a:9). Elements of these processes of connectivity are described and explored through the family photographs and reactions to them discussed in this chapter. However, their destruction and some of the narratives which surround them are practices of editing, cutting and severing certain types of familial relationships and understandings of self over time. So how can we make sense of this cutting of family and personal relations in the context of and constitutive of social history? And how might this time-depth inform our understanding of the process of Damascene kinship?

Bouquet posits that the complexities of photographic ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ bear comparison with kinship substance¹. Following Franklin’s assertions that ‘new reproductive technology is increasingly seen as commensurate with the generative power of life itself’ (1997:211 cited in Bouquet 2001:87) Bouquet suggests that the generative and substance-like qualities of older kinship technologies, such as family photographs, need greater explication (2001:87). Her focus is on how photographs and descriptions of photographs circulate as a kind of substance that parallels other constitutive substances of kinship, which can then be seen to be replicated by anthropology’s conventions concerning what kinship ‘is’ and ‘looks like’. Here, I push more at the specificity and ‘connectivity’ of kin relations to suggest that these photographic practices can only be fully understood through comparison with other elements of kinship such as parental control and kinship substance. In a parallel thread to Joseph’s (1994) consideration of cross-subjective enactment and ‘connectivity’, Jean-Klein (2000) discusses the specific cross-subjectivity of mother-son personhood in the context of Palestinian martyrdom and detainment. From her ethnographic evidence combined with Battaglia’s (1995) assertion of the self as a ‘representational economy’, one of the elements Jean-Klein asks to be taken seriously is the corporeality and cross-embodiment that specific forms of cross-

¹ Bouquet’s initial observations stem from the parity she sees between Schneider’s (1968) distinction of shared ‘biogenetic substance’ (nature) versus ‘code of conduct’ (culture) in his study of American kinship, and the ways photographs are distinguished as a form of material culture from the ways people deploy and invest them with meaning (2001:86). However, her own recognition that the nature/culture dichotomy is unsustainable and broader questions about the sense in which material objects constitute a kinship substance, moves her suppositions closer to regarding photographs as mediatory, intervening and doubly constitutive (2001:112).

subjective kin relationships manifest (2000:104). In the ethnography presented here, the types of cross-embodiment Jean-Klein discusses, in particular those of mother and child to which the images bear witness in a manner of ways, are salient areas of consideration not least because they are problematic. Mawiyah and her mother's concerns with corporeality and carnality in images, due to the answerability on the Day-of-Judgement which required the photographs' destruction, reflects upon and alters the quality of kinship cross-subjectivity.

Barthes distinguished three points of view grounded in subjective experience from which to explore photography; the photographer, the person photographed and the gazing 'spectator' (1981). His assertions about the synchrony of death and the image stem primarily from one chapter in *Camera Lucida* where he discusses what it is to be the person photographed. So uncomfortable is this position, which in his own terms makes the subject feel he is becoming an object, that almost all the rest of the following 42 chapters are devoted to being 'the spectator'. As spectator, he definitively locates the image of photography in one specific picture; that of his own mother. Importantly for Barthes, it is not a generic 'mother' (*studium*) who is the quintessentialised photographed subject but 'my mother' (*punctum*) about which he says 'To the Mother-as-Good, she had added that grace of being an individual soul' (1981:74-75). It is precisely where Barthes leaves the position of 'person being photographed' - as Gallop puts it 'in the mothers lap' (1997:68) - where Mawiyah and Suhar as mothers and grandmothers, and I as anthropologist pick it up. Yet in this instance of eschatological fear, the immutability of the family-situated 'my mother' becomes problematic, with the Mother-as-Ambiguous, her soul in jeopardy and her individuality a point of contention.

For the woman described in the ethnographic snapshot, Mawiyah, the direct reason these photographs required destruction was a question of religious faith and submission. The photographs contained images of adult female family members unveiled and/or veiled in a manner not deemed modest enough by the standards they had grown to hold in the proceeding years. Thus issues of gendered change and moralising appeared to be embodied and captured in the photos. Framing these understandings was a concern about the possible closeness of the day of judgement, creating a vague but significant deadline.

Muslim eschatological knowledge wove freely with day-to-day life and potent events. Sometimes it was in sharp focus, sometimes not, illustrating the multiplicity of temporality in daily life. That winter, Mawiyah's father had fallen ill and this had precipitated a 'moral health scare' for Mawiyah's mother Suhar, who had become concerned that after her death these photographs would fall under the gaze of male strangers, compromising their modesty through the images' continued existence. Through the combination of the serious illness of her husband and her growing personal religiosity, Suhar had come to 'reckon with time' as Heidegger's opus frames it; time and mortality becoming mutually knowable through her implicit and explicit orientation towards death (and God). Through confrontation with mortality, she had come to measure time and its limits (Ricoeur 1980:175) and her daily life and speech became increasingly concerned with its literal 'dead-line' and what would happen *after*. She concerned herself particularly with the anxieties of future time, discussing her own mortality and her feelings of lack of control towards it, specifically her image. Analytically, this raises questions about how individuals and families negotiate how they wish to be remembered once they have passed away. Specifically, what does family archiving and curating/editing of images convey about the intersection of kinship, memory and time? Who are the intended audiences of Damascene family photographs? Why have images of unveiled women become so problematic that they must be destroyed completely?

A cursory consideration of the event of destruction as described above suggests an involved context enveloping and extending from an elderly lady's confrontation with mortality. Family members, male and female, younger and older, expressed various reasons for, causal narratives of and reactions to this definite and 'destructive' act. Explication within this one family ranged from the problems of answering to God on the Muslim Day-of-Judgement when such 'indiscreet' and problematic images still existed, to bitter family disputes over freedoms, resources, the provenance of past events and those occurring at the point of fieldwork. These different perspectives illustrate the interlacing of multiple temporalities in relation to the images and contexts. Regardless of outlook, eschatological or pragmatic, the immediacy of this future depended on where an individual was in their life-cycle. As mothers and grandmother, Mawiyah and Suhar had different but interconnected

relationships to these images and their destruction. I argue that it is precisely the corporeal, sensual and substantive kinship reciprocity between image and memory that makes this embodiment powerful and problematic. Ultimately it makes the objects themselves subordinate to a contemporary and future ‘memory’ rather than the past.

Photographs: images of historical teleology

I start with the narrative content displayed and channelled through these photos as they were shown. This leads me to suggest that these narrative structures illustrate individuals and families situating themselves and understanding themselves as instrumental in ‘historical time’ (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990:17). I ask what can this tell us about their evidential nature and why they were deployed in relation to a situated present? My previous encounters with the now deceased photographic images were as referents of a detailed family history in conversations and interviews with Mawiyah and her family members, in particular her mother and siblings. Within this context, the photographic images acted as prompts for narratives and biographies. Over multiple tellings and cross-tellings, certain types of retrospective causality came to the fore, making a kind of teleological history which was significant to my informants, especially Mawiyah. To elucidate the significance of the gazed-upon, handled photographs and the final photograph’s survival, I present an outline of this family’s history as revealed through the photographs, or rather my summarised descriptions of the images in relation to the narratives that especially Mawiyah and Suhar told as prompted by the actual photographs.

A lone photograph from the 1920s shows a baleful collection of children surrounding their parents. The children’s mother sits demurely, her hair in a fashionable, angular bob.

At the time when this photograph was taken, the extended family was living in various places across the Levant. According to Mawiyah’s mother Suhar, her own father (Mawiyah’s grandfather) had left Aleppo and then (what is now) Syria via

Damascus as a young man. ‘He went to Palestine when all of Syria was Ottoman’, she explained, ‘He went there for trade’. She seemed vague about what ‘trade’ he was involved in, at one point suggesting olives and at another the famous Aleppine olive oil-based soap. He left behind his family in Aleppo after his own father was killed and his mother re-married. This maternal grandfather was a figure writ large within Mawiyah’s family. Before his life, the family’s background and specifics were hazy and contested by the various family members; ‘We were wealthy from an established religious family near Aleppo’, ‘Not from Aleppo but originally from Damascus’, ‘No they were from Mezza originally, when it was just a village by Damascus and they were poor’, Mawiyah’s eldest brother chipped in. Whichever narrative pinpointed their grandfather’s life-course and origins most accurately², his movement from the north of Syria to Palestine and then later to Damascus is a reflection of spatial mobility of the region under the Ottoman Empire (Choueiri 1993a; 2000). As Mawiyah’s mother put it with glowing-eyed nostalgia, ‘All of Syria was Ottoman’. What she meant by this is that all of what can be called the Levant, including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine/Israel were part of a greater Syria under the Ottoman jurisdiction (Yapp 1987). After the First World War and in Mandate Palestine, her father married a local Ramallah girl. Mawiyah’s mother explained to me her biography saying, ‘*ḥabībī*, this is my home now, my father made Damascus his home after 1948, but Palestine is also my home. My father was in the British army... Yes! He was an officer in the British Army, he was a Palestinian officer. He was clever and he received English lessons. Yes! He spoke English excellently’. This Mawiyah concurred with, fleshing out the portrait of her grandfather’s character when we examined the photographs again on the evening of their demise. ‘My grandfather walked everywhere, like the Prophet, after every meal he would walk. Here in Damascus he was over 100 years but he still walked up Mount Qassioun every day!’

Mawiyah’s maternal grandfather grew up and established a family during a period of distinct change across the Middle East. Born within the Ottoman Empire, romanticised by his daughter and granddaughter as a time of unfettered movement

² It seems likely that since his background was ambiguous he did not come from a wealthy background, but rather was a young entrepreneur who became successful (Meriwether 1999).

across the region, he lived through the extreme deprivation of the First World War and its aftermath across the Middle East (Rafeq 1993:111; Thompson 2000:19). As Mawiyah elaborated, her grandfather had explained how he had been glad he was not in Syria and Damascus after the First World War as it had been at the centre of the starvation and illness that wracked the region. This she linked to the photograph's plethora of children and lack of other adult family members. 'Before [the First World War] Syrian women only had children once every 7 years, this is our tradition... After the starvation, so many people died, families became bigger, babies every year'. Within the picture, the central figure in the sea of children is Mawiyah's maternal grandmother, whom she remembers fondly from their home in Duuma.

When Suhar was absent, Mawiyah's elder brother interjected his opinion of this oldest image, pointing out that Suhar was unlikely to have been born at the point the image was taken in the late 1920s and therefore the baby in the photograph was most likely one of her older siblings or possibly one of several that had not survived infancy. Mawiyah concurred but in this instance, did not question Suhar's claims to her baby self in the photograph to her face.

A monochrome young couple, sat demurely on a bed holding hands, their eyes bright and their smiles coy trying to hide their happiness. The couple on the bed are the woman's mother and father on their engagement.

Mawiyah's mother and father had known one another since childhood. Their families were related on their father's side as cousins, and Suhar calls her husband (*ibn 'am*) first cousin although they are once removed. Both of their immediate families had moved to Ramallah from Syria between the two wars and then moved back to Damascus after 1948, an experience Suhar recalled through her remembered tiredness from walking. In the spring of 1955 they became engaged. 'I was very happy because he had blue eyes like my father', she explained, beaming with pleasure. The 1950s were a comfortable time for this family. Both of their parents owned homes, one set in new apartment blocks in Duuma, which was then a large village close to Damascus just beginning to be used as a satellite town. She had trained as a teacher and he was an engineer who later worked in the newly developed

Damascus airport. In the photograph she is wearing a nipped-in pale dress with short bell sleeves that she remembered as being yellow. A tall window behind them is letting in light framed by the wooden shutters that typify architectural style in Syria from the French Mandate and after (Thompson 2000:181). Suhar has vivid memories of the garden outside and the smell of tuberose. Visiting other families, I saw many similar pictures to this, and those of jaunty ranks of young men and women at family gatherings like engagement parties. This period of post-independence represents perhaps the height of Syrian modernism as expressed through social mobility and material contexts via the army and education (Seale 1965; Petran 1972; Hinnebusch 1991:36). Certainly, retrospectively through narratives around photographs it was regarded as a period of intense modernisation. During this period, there was an active move towards secular Pan-Arab politics and identity that was briefly realised in the Syrio-Egyptian Union (Choueiri 2000:167, 189). Damascenes talked about this time as one of post-independence changes such as the rise of service and blue collar industries, precipitating an emphasis on technical training and the active membership of clubs such as scouts and political parties (Khoury 1987; Ayubi 2008 [1995]:94, 116).

Glossier colour photographs of family celebrations and holidays. A mother and children sit in the shade of blossoming apricot and almond trees enjoying a picnic. Photographs are in glowing colours showing a party at home with a spread of food and family dancing, light prisms in the image. A dapper gentleman in a grey suit resting his hand gently around the waist of a teenage girl whose cheeks are as aglow as her pink frock at a dancing competition. They show picnics in the family's orchard in the Ghuteh. They show a wedding anniversary, organised and cooked for by the woman for her parents. 'I cooked it all!' the woman had explained to me with pride. The couple dancing are father and daughter, entering a dancing competition together.

By the 1960s the family was outgrowing their section of Mawiyah's father's family apartment building, and by 1972 they had eight children. 'Four boys and four girls thank God. Finish, that is enough!' laughed Suhar. They had also outgrown Duuma,

their elevated financial status allowing them to move to Damascus proper. Unusually, both husband and wife had good jobs; he at the airport, she as a headmistress of a primary school and a Ba'ath party member, relying on family for childcare. In time, they bought a house in the mountainside district of Muhajareen. Although their family background was not especially wealthy, they had made good use of the opportunities presented by the new post-colonial state and their large family acted as a net to catch and pool resources. 'All our family helped in those days, there was no 'this is mine and this is yours', we all helped each other', Mawiyah intoned with nostalgia. Mawiyah reflected on how lovely her parent's house had been during this period. 'We always had so many visitors and family. My mother had lots of parties and weddings at our house. Everyone from the area would come to our home for engagement parties and weddings'. Mawiyah's own organisation of a wedding anniversary party for her parents reflects her desire at that time to emulate 'modern' and 'Western' attitudes to marriage and romance. 'I read about it in a magazine, so lovely. I used to collect recipes from these magazines for food like lasagne and European food, then I would cook it! Yes I cooked it all!'. Turning to the dancing competition she smiled with recollection, her face and words slightly ambivalent. 'Really it was not appropriate – I don't recognise myself. Look how slim I was!'

While looking at these photographs she also introduced a more explicitly religious and political narrative, explaining that in 1967 when Syria went to war with Israel, everyone came to her parent's house to wait and watch. 'On the mountainside, in Muhajareen we knew something was going to happen, the *sheikhs* told us and in Seidniyya Miriam wept [the icon of Mary in the convent of Our Lady]'. Her narrative took on a solemn tone, telling me how this period had awoken religious sentiments in her family that had already existed but had been 'sat-on'. For Mawiyah, the move to Muhajareen had precipitated a rising individual religious awareness within their family. 'My elder sister, my brother and I began to learn about the Qur'an, to study it carefully', Mawiyah recalled.

From these interlocking and divergent narratives between mother and daughter the multiplicity of history and memory arose. On inspection of these same photographs her mother, Suhar, tells a subtly different story. 'I wanted to move to

Muhajareen because it was a good Muslim area, I wanted to be close to the ash-Sheikh mohie ad-deen mosque. I told my husband, now we must live like better Muslims'. Considering the photographs, Mawiyah scoffed when I reminded her of her mother's interpretation. 'Then she knew nothing about Islam, I had to show her. My grandfather was a good religious man, but she was not, she was a Party member (meaning Ba'ath)... sometimes she wore the *hijab*, but not properly, look'. She proffered the photograph of the family picnicking in the Orchard where her mother is wearing a loose headscarf as evidence. 'She wore it because older women wore the headscarf when they had finished having children; none of us felt it in our hearts then. I was the first one to wear it properly', she ended proudly.

During this period the Ba'ath Party had risen to power. At the point political secularism prevailed in Syria, reaction against secularism and moves towards Islamic revivalism emerged as a politico-social countertrend (Khoury 1983). Mawiyah's slight towards her mother reflects this gradual slippage from secularism to renewed religiosity in the region (Bille 2010). This illustrates not only the contested nature of insertion into this historical social change, linked to international politics, but also an active participation in this movement expressed through the familial tensions between mother and daughter.

Lines of children on the beach, their swimsuits saturated blobs of colour. A family on a boat, their hair swept in a sea breeze so that only the toothy grins of children and teenagers can be seen of their faces. The colour photographs are later, they show the woman with her brothers and sisters and her mother in places like Latakia and Tartus on the Mediterranean coast in the 1970's, some of which she is conspicuously absent from.

'Look at how lovely Syria is! Have you been to Latakia? It's so beautiful'. Increased holidaying for Syrians took form under Asad's Ba'athism (Hinnbusch 2001) and reflects the family's position economically and socially. This period seemed to be identified by Mawiyah as a cusp between narratives of causality in her life. Having been a prominent figure in the previous photographs, she is noticeably absent from later holiday photographs (not because she was taking them), an omission that will

be discussed later. The two sisters who are similar in age to Mawiyah, one elder the other younger, stand smiling out of the photographs, holding younger siblings' hands lest they fall into the Mediterranean. They appear as young women and are dressed demurely in dresses, not swim suits, for their holiday. The glossy smiles and holiday clothes mask a period of stagnation and eventual decline in the economic fortunes of this family and in some respects Syria generally. Mawiyah's brother leaned over and pointed out how these holidays had become shorter and more basic as prices had become greater over the late 1970s and '80s.

Three young women in neat 1980s suits with pencil skirts, heels and candyfloss hair to match. The three are sisters at the beginning of their working lives, who used to swap clothes so it appeared they had more 'European style' twin sets and trouser suits for their work.

Following graduation from University, the three sisters had obtained jobs within close proximity of each other. Mawiyah and her younger sister Galia had both obtained degrees in science, Mawiyah in chemistry and Galia in pharmacology. 'We worked in the same hospital, the Damascus hospital. I worked in the mornings and Galia worked in the evenings. We shared the clothes, they were my clothes; I saved to get the best European fashions but Galia always spent her money on other things, so she took my clothes', reminisced Mawiyah. Whilst discussing this period, Mawiyah spoke fondly of the freedoms she had enjoyed; saving money, enjoying leisure and sport activities such as basketball and dance classes. She explained that she and her sister had decided to return to University around the time of this photograph, and she had undertaken a Masters in Chemistry to improve her job prospects. The manner in which she reflected on this photograph as a period of comparative order and success for her as a young woman was illustrated by her changing expression from pride to a bitter set. She explained that it had been whilst doing her Masters that she had met and married the father of her children Aamal, Muhammad and Mustafa. 'We are four sisters, two made good marriages, two made bad marriages', she concluded drily.

Selves in historical time: narratives of social change contested

I have presented these ‘snapshots’ in order to convey the manner in which information about family histories and narratives, family generations and biographies was offered, collected and approached ethnographically during my fieldwork. They are also my working-through of biographical information and cross-referencing against my ever-changing ‘historical’ knowledge of the social context my informants discussed. They do not offer a holistic vision of a family and its workings, nor are they a comprehensive account of Syrian history or this family’s place in it. Rather, what emerges is an account of an historicisation of the personal and of kinship in which my informants and I were engaged. Mawiyah, Suhar and other family members placed the photographs and their family’s past in relation to historical events and social changes that they regarded as key. They also placed themselves as not only entwined with the wider social changes depicted, but in some respects instrumental to their development in a small way. Importantly, they distinguished between points whereby they and their family had been shaped by forces beyond their control (the creation of Israel) and those where their active, volitional choices had been integral, the contrast highlighting when and how they understood their own agency. This is particularly clear for their growing religiosity, a process which is often asserted either as inevitable, change acting from without (see Choueiri 2010), or alternatively framed in terms of individualised self-making not integrated with familial processes (Asad 1993; Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2004). Here it interwove with layers of political reaction (the ongoing war with Israel) and temporal reckoning (relationships to mortality) within cross-generational family dynamics.

Some of the distinct temporal and historical ordering of seeing and burning these photographs is lost in telling as I cannot fully emulate the careful intent with which Mawiyah, and other informants repeatedly sorted the photographs in order to allow me to peruse them, and it would be confusing had I described these photographs exactly in the order they were described to me. Indeed, it took great concentration to comprehend the relationships and narratives being presented to me, not least because many narratives and biographical details contradicted what I had

been told at other times by other family members. Moreover the manner in which they were historicised was often framed in a radically different manner to my own understanding of the relevant historical changes. Memory and its telling conveyed more than raw ‘facts’ about the past. For example, the contrasting narratives of Suhar’s father’s peregrinations and her own memories of leaving Palestine testify to the fragility of links between past and present. In relation to changing national borders, Carsten (2007) suggests ‘In the detailed tracing of these dispositions in time we can see how loss can constitute its own form of historicity’ (2007:24). We can also see how links between past and future are not inevitable but require work to maintain them, especially within a particular narrative.

From the account I have offered, several interesting meta-narratives emerge but I wish to focus on the temporal-structural kinship formulations they express. The photographs illustrate a pattern of kinship recognisable to the family in question and to other Syrians, and from standard anthropological accounts of Middle Eastern kinship, as common and normative. Throughout the movement between specific cities/places within the Levant, a common pattern of kinship from a female perspective can be charted. An elderly woman, Suhar, charts her kinship via her father, prioritising her patrilineal background over many of her other relationships (Peters 1978; Moors 1995). She married a male relative whom she can call cousin (Keyser 1974:294), with whom she was also compatible socio-economically and educationally, and was attracted to beyond the realms of duty; the engagement photograph offering a kind of evidence for their mutual happiness at the time. She simultaneously pursued a career as a teacher and mothered eight children, possible because of extended family labour and support, whilst indicative of mid-20th century socio-economic change (Hijab 1988; Rabo 1996). Her own children hold her paternal family in high esteem, gaining identity through their relationship and memories of them. They affiliate themselves with their own paternal family, through name and authority (Peters 1976; Atran 1986) making their maternal and paternal genealogy qualitatively different *and* highly co-constituted. Now she is old, all her children except her youngest son are married and she has a host of grandchildren and a few great-grandchildren.

Other elements, however, sit less comfortably with reified accounts of Syrian kinship. Suhar was explicitly concerned with the fate of these photographs in more than an abstract sense. In particular, with the possibility that after her death, one of Suhar's sons might show them to non-family members, especially men. This concern complicates the classic image of the tight bond between mother and son in Middle Eastern kinship as previously mentioned (Kandiyoti 1991; Joseph 1999; Jean-Klein 2000). The mother-son relationship has epitomised Middle Eastern kinship cross-subjectivity or 'connective selfhood' in a patriarchal context, mothers investing more heavily in their sentimental and material relationships with their sons than with husbands and/or daughters (Kandiyoti 1991). Analysis leaning towards materialism suggests this is a pragmatic solution for mothers whose marital position (and that of their daughters) may be precarious (Kandiyoti 1991; Moors 1995:62, 75). Meanwhile the analyses of Joseph (1999) and Jean-Klein (2000) discussed previously focus more heavily on affective exchange and inter-subjectivity inherent in these mother-son relationships, whereby both are made person through their relationship with the other and their mutual actions (Joseph 1999d:181; Jean-Klein 2000). Certainly Suhar was close to all of her sons, especially the second from youngest, each mutually fretting over the other's concerns and taking pleasure from each other's triumphs and contentment. For example, one of her elder sons made a special trip to the suburb of Dariyya to purchase some olives for his mother after she complained that she could not find the ones she was seeking; he claimed that he had been unable to sleep due to her disappointment. Yet emotional closeness did not automatically translate to 'trust' in the context of these photos. Although Suhar was unwilling to say who or how exactly this jeopardy might manifest itself, it seemed that she had a clear image of where the peril emanated from; one or more of her sons could not be trusted or controlled to fulfil her wishes.

Regardless of other factors, the high stakes (her eternal soul) meant that this worry was not open to dissuasion by her favourite son. Indeed, perhaps it was the way even he batted away her concerns which encouraged her personal vehemence. Mother-son cross-subjectivity is not only about affection, it also encompasses a certain amount of 'knowing' what the other might be capable of. Moreover Suhar may have had reason to worry; several of the widowed women I interviewed to

collect their life-stories apologised for not having any photographs. In a couple of instances, they explained with concern that their sons had taken them. Strong emotional, connective and inter-subjective bonds did not guarantee the same set of interests or priorities. As Joseph points out, relational matrices which shape a sense of self do not preclude distinctive agency and initiative (1999a:11) and as Jean-Klein illustrates, in certain patriarchal and political contexts it is exactly this mother-son cross-subjectivity which fosters effective independent masculine interpersonal control (2000:101, 122). Sons cannot automatically be relied on to archive, to remember 'correctly' or to forget or keep private appropriately; especially when a mother's physical presence has receded after death. This example begins to address what family archiving and curating/editing of photographs might reveal about the intersection of kinship, memory and time. It seems that tensions and competing narratives tangle the smooth lines of harmonious cross-subjectivity. Kinship is paramount, but it is not only changing relations with other family members that are apparent, it is also the layered relationships persons have with past selves, and past others, which flesh out the multiple temporalities family members hold and orients kinship towards evidence and experience.

In Suhar's case, her sons and daughters were both likely to dispute her claims on the provenance of images, their contexts and meanings (such as her birth or her past religio-political orientations). But these contradictions had different implications depending on individual children. For example, mother and daughter told related but distinct narratives of the family's move towards greater religiosity. Both Suhar and Mawiyah asserted their personal agency in this process as instrumental, contesting their individual roles. Mawiyah's brother, meanwhile, outright contradicted the narrative plot which Suhar had asserted, insisting that his mother had not been born at the time of the image which offered possible corroboration of her birth in Palestine. It should be noted that Suhar's sons had more invested in their identity as Syrian as opposed to Palestinian, than did Suhar or Mawiyah, not least for legal practicalities relating to citizenship, work and travel. The competing narratives of social change within this one family reveal not only different interpretations of a process, but also aspects of the power dynamics between individuals across generations through the issue of control over memory.

The burning of the photographs was a particularly forceful example of curating, editing and controlling images. The responses to the photographs' content, both narrative and physical expression are equally interesting in the process of self and family historicisation. Neither Mawiyah nor Suhar, along with other informants, were universally positive about the images or the memories they captured/triggered. Smiles of pleasure turned quickly to scowls of vexation (or vice versa). Mawiyah would enjoy telling a story about the past, but coda it with disapproving remarks, especially about her past actions and choices. Similarly other informants, within and beyond this family, were quick to criticise past selves and others portrayed on contemporary 'moral' grounds. Individuals would struggle to varying degrees to 'know' themselves in images from the past, though knowing the images were of them, simultaneously eliciting alienation and intimacy with past selves.

Holly (1996) suggests that in studying a past image, 'we may be striving to look at its visual traces without realizing... (it is)... forever looking back at us' (1996:xiv). It seems that this reflexivity is something Mawiyah, Suhar and others were aware of. This awareness of past selves fed into other aspects of narrative contained in the images. Social change interwove with biography and the trials and tribulations therein. The photographs were not only triggers for their historicising memories, but also a specific form of evidence, acting in this instance as a net of rebellion, dependency and control between mother and daughter. Both Suhar and Mawiyah had profound and related, though distinct, reasons for emphasising the carnate problems of photography. This context of mother-daughter generational control which wove them together also caused constant tension, adding another layer to their assertions of effervescent religiosity.

Photographic logics: gender, display & reciprocity

Within the ethnographic example I have elaborated, and wider Syrian and Middle Eastern contexts, the photograph appears as a loaded form of representation. On a couple of occasions I was asked directly by Syrians, 'Why in Western countries do you display so many photographs in your homes?' In both instances, I was under the impression that this was not an actual question but rather a way of making a point;

firstly, about the differences between a perceived ‘Middle East’ and ‘West’ and secondly, a distinction that alluded to the potency of the photograph as a representational image. To elaborate these distinctions, one of my questioners went on to assert, ‘In Syria, for Muslims especially, it is bad and dangerous to show images of people... this is oooh (a sharp intake of breath) *ḥarām* (ill-advised/a shame)... no more than *ḥarām*, it is a big problem’. Although not especially religious, he was referring to the possible problems associated with the malign power of the eye and the jealous consequences it might elicit, and with the worship of false icons (Bille 2010). However, he went on to clarify that there was more to it than following religious proscription and finally concluded ‘if you have an image up to display anyone can see it, especially if it is a private family photograph, I don’t know, it doesn’t feel right, it’s like showing off or something’. It seems he was referring to the same concern about the nature of modesty and control over pictorial images as was Mawiyah’s family’s obliteration of photographic objects. His perspective was less directly religious and made no reference to the looming Day-of-Judgement. Rather, he was couching his point in a holistic outlook of Islamic and Syrian notions of personal and familial morality. His commentary was, in one sense, more expansive in that it was concerned with the general photographic display within homes and touched on the possible *louche* links between ‘Western’ photographic display and personal morality. However, in another sense, it was less expansive in that he made no explicit mention of the transcendental or the possibility of actions in this life impacting on future lives or this life other than perceived lack of modesty. This reticence towards the display of family snaps and portraiture is given added dimensions by the ubiquity of mobile phones able to capture photos and videos, which Syrians invariably did in public and domestic spaces. The mobile phone’s relatively recent conflation of the visual (camera) and oral/aural (telephone) prostheses (Jay 1994) makes the control of one’s image a daily process of negotiation, apparently primarily the responsibility of the ‘snapped’ rather than the ‘snapper’. In other words, prohibitions on display are accompanied by the possibility of one’s image being taken and shown to others without control. Consequently, individuals take care to limit this visual profligacy of their recorded image through

direct intervention ('Delete that') and recourse to a shared logic ('Would you like it if I took a picture of you/your mother/sister?').

So what can we gain from the subtle tensions between capture and display of images and their control in a wider context? In relatively affluent homes, sideboards used to display coffee ornaments also sometimes acted as home for framed photographs. In poorer homes, sections of walls or the lone item of standing furniture (such as a wardrobe) would be devoted to glued or pinned photographs, depicting family members alongside popular music and TV stars. Yet this did not mean there was a free-for-all of photographic images or the sort of compositional groupings of families recorded elsewhere in the literature (Halle 1993; Rose 2003; Empson 2007).

In most homes I visited, it was striking how bare of any images walls were especially within reception spaces. It was largely only among those fortunate enough to have calligraphic representations of their family trees, wealthy enough to own landscape paintings or inclined enough to do intricate tapestries or embroidery that walls were furnished with anything other than framed passages of the Quran. This is indicative of a careful display aesthetic in the privacy of the home, which through the separation or absence of images of familial affection juxtaposes the visual representation with the religious word (Bille 2010). Thus we are reminded of the layering of sensual modalities, especially the ocular and the oral, which contributes to the fabric of a lived environment in a context shaped by centuries of Islamic practice through and beyond the terms of modesty (Messick 1993; Hirschkind 2006).

Reticence towards photographic images was further complicated by factors beyond familial control. On the street, advertising campaigns both commercial and political dominated many public spaces and within the home, images of ex-President Hafiz Asad, current President Bashar Asad and his late older brother Basil Asad were common. So much so that small stickers and larger posters depicting their faces often infested unexpected places such as corners of furniture or gloomy stair wells. Similarly stylised, high-contrast monochrome graphics of their busts (mimicking Fitzpatrick's famous Che Guevara iconography) were posted in car rear windows. By the time of fieldwork, this enthusiasm for the President's image was ambiguous; once 'encouraged' by the regime as a sign of support, during the 2000s it had been simultaneously discouraged *and* continued by Party and State seemingly leaving

citizens unsure about the requisite level of display. The concept of the image then slides beyond personal or religious senses of control into the mire of political sentiments and the game of second-guessing on a day-to-day basis of appropriate behaviour. My informant's comment of image display as 'showing off or something' and other similar sentiments take on another edge, but then the nonchalant obliviousness with which people treat these presidential images also suggests their ubiquity makes them, if not invisible, a part of the cityscape and beyond comment or comparative judgement. These practices of ambiguous statecraft complicate notions of who is seeing and watching with aesthetics of divine power, mutually creating and contrasting with state power and surveillance. Do these images in themselves gain or lose potency through their continual display? Does the distinctly male image contain a different set of concerns than those of family groups and women?



Images of former President Hafiz Asad and President Bashar Asad are present throughout streets and houses. In this instance, they are joined by deceased Basil Asad and younger brother Maher.

An answer may be presented by the manner in which these political images are mirrored in professional portraits of family 'patriarchs', which represented the

most dominant family images in homes, if present (besides family trees and passages from the Qur'an). Similarly, founders of shops might also be presented prominently on the premises, observing both customers and staff under an authoritative gaze. Photographic representations of family members tended to be professional studio prints and typically depicted only male members of the family, in particular older men who had achieved a level of seniority within their families and professional lives. Such pictures reflected the aesthetic of formal political and social portraits in public spaces like shops, where the founder and President (past or present) gaze down on workers and customers. The distinction of gender and seniority means that the images themselves are as much the gazers as those looking at the portraits, shifting the balance of control. Any concerns about modesty (which do certainly *apply* to men as well as women) were seemingly overridden by the potential value of actively displaying men of distinction.

When displayed or framed, domestic photographic images often contained 'Photoshopped' montages, in particular framed photographs that showed women or teenagers. A common theme was that of mother and child. The image of a young mother with a white headscarf, holding a smartly dressed toddler to her cheek surrounded by an imposed background of landscape and pink hearts was so ubiquitous that I had to check carefully to see if the image *actually* and not figuratively represented family members. In some homes, already highly-posed and orchestrated photographic images of family members were overlaid or surrounded by cut-outs from magazines of television soap-opera characters and other images such as small babies deemed to be '*Kābūsh*' (*colloq.*) (cute apple-cheeked baby). The process of photographic montaging has been widely recorded (Pinney 1990; Empson 2007:63, 65; Manuaguru forthcoming). As Harris suggests, this practice speaks of the inherent limitations revealed within a photographic object and its image. They may also overcome other physical and political boundaries that there is a desire to reincarnate (Harris 2004:145) like the inability to travel due to funding and national-regional restrictions, connecting bodies in places that are otherwise impossible. Such photographs, with various backgrounds and overlays, contrasted in their busy composition and playfulness with the stark formality of senior male portraiture. They were, I would suggest, attempts to deal with the same link between seeing/viewing

and ‘knowing’ that Mawiyah, Suhar, their family and others riled against. However, instead of destroying evidence, the means was one of augmenting with reified symbols to channel the viewer’s perception and knowledge of the individuals they were looking at into a type of narrative. By observing these images you were not looking at ‘a woman’ in her life with her possible faults open to discussion but at ‘a modest and loving mother’ as signified by child, white headscarf, serene landscape and pink hearts. The ‘grace’ of a mother which Barthes identifies, is not automatically attached to ‘being an individual soul’ (1981:75) in this instance, but rather in cross-subjective association with her child and appropriate comportment.

Similar cross-subjective associations are apparent in images of young men with siblings, cousins and friends on a backdrop of landscape either studio or tourist site; ‘*shabāb*’ (young men) are seen performing the requisite sociality of communal action (Stenberg 2005). For Syrians, posed and altered photographic expressions that loosely fulfilled a role appeared less problematic and much less about ‘showing off’ than more individual or ‘naturalistic’ images. This was doubly emphasised by more secular but still religious Muslims who would proudly show me pictures of themselves posed outside ancient wineries in Lebanon despite their strong objection to even the selling of alcohol. Such sites were places of historical interest and so long as the right posture was struck, posed no contradiction to their moral selves; hence we are reminded how images and their production prefigure the shape of their subsequent histories (Holly 1996:xiii). Such pictures were still limited in their display, confined to private spaces such as family living rooms and bedrooms rather than formal reception spaces.

From these examples and descriptions, the potency and also subtlety attached to display of photographic objects begins to be elucidated. It is senior men and the young who are most repetitively represented as individuals on display, whereas women are displayed and represented as one generic feminine ideal, ‘the young mother’. Though other types of photographs of woman are taken in abundance, their display is problematic. This visual tension is played out slightly differently in media such as film which facilitate greater narrative construction but ultimately, a logic of control over personal and familial visual representation is reinforced. For example, it is not problematic to display unveiled television celebrities and hail them as beautiful

because their image is already in the public domain. It is, however, quite another thing to aspire to being a television celebrity. Such stars spotted around Damascus were actively admired for their beauty and sophistication; however, their moral character was questioned, due not to purported indiscretions but simply their career choice. After performing in some children's shows, Mawiyah's daughter Aamal was offered some bit parts on a Syrian comedy sketch-show series aimed at families. Such work would have paid better than other options at the time but she refused, explaining to me, 'I couldn't bear the thought of all those people seeing me, of my father (estranged) seeing me... it's not a good career path. People think, "If you'll do that then you'll do anything for money!"'. Aamal's concerns were supported by wider presumptions about the 'immodesty' of TV actors, especially female. It seemed to me that Aamal, who enjoyed acting and regularly performed to crowds of families, was most concerned about the way she would be viewed and judged, unable to reciprocate or alter opinion by the force of her personality which she so often daringly utilised to legitimise her actions to others.

In this section, discussion of Damascene attitudes towards, uses of and contexts surrounding images points to the subtleties of control they require and embody. Shot through with configurations of gender, political display and forms of emotive reciprocity and alterity they continue to appear ambiguous. This ambiguity, I suggest, becomes both more understandable and productive when we return to the specificities of control of these images made by gendered individuals within their families. In other words, an overview offers a sense of the tension between ocularcentrism, the truth and knowing which the visual medium can contain, with the discourse of modesty that wishes to curtail this power through control. It is through the dynamics of kinship, including the corporeal and substantive, that the specific potency of family snaps can be fully grappled with to account for their memorial and generative capacities.

Photographs: objects of carnal evidence

The descriptions here of photographs and their contexts build a series of snapshots, a virtual photographic album of the Gordian knot of anthropological fieldwork that

dives into the intimate but cannot then fully express what has been found precisely because it is *too intimate* (Day, Papataxiarchēs and Stewart 1999). Suhar and Mawiyah's concern that these images should not be seen by strangers, especially male, means my descriptions must stand in for copies of the originals. The photographs were objects of evidence for both my informants and me. Yet I cannot share this evidence without negating the intentions of my informants, namely that they should remain private. Shared evidential outlooks were militated by our personal agendas. Knowing that the photographs were to be destroyed, I grappled with my desire to secretly take photographs of them. But why? Many photographic images are destroyed or lost inadvertently; most moments of kinship life so far have remained un-transposed into image format. What was so unsettling about this context of destruction and what might my reaction elucidate?

The frustration you might feel as a reader, being excluded from these visual worlds, is symptomatic of the very essence of these processes of curation and control. Any irritation the reader feels conveys a small taste of the intention of destruction and in so doing heightens awareness of the familial and moral terms at stake. Conversely, as Barthes points out, from an ethnographic perspective reproducing images would nullify their potency - for the family I discuss, they contained a host of meaning and sentiment but for others it may present at best only the *studium* Barthes refers to or an 'indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'' (1981:73). In some respects, this is illustrative of the impossibility of transcending the 'text' of anthropological work. Presenting photographic forms of evidence would convey little other than the proof of my being there and the claims of anthropological authority (Pinney 1990:52). They would be illustrative of my and possibly our shared perceptions of the passage of time, and cause and effect, without especially conveying the *punctum* of these now deceased images or the motivation behind their demise.

This discussion feeds into a host of issues about revealing and concealing more generally in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean milieu as well as the context of 'Islamic ethics' (Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2006; Hoek 2009). We are forced to ask, what is being concealed? How and why is this accomplished? What is revealed in the process of concealment? Although I cannot display images of the

people and photographs under discussion, I do have permission to discuss their intimate biographical details. This has methodological significance since the reason for this was in small part, my position as anthropologist and in large part, the place of biographical narrative in the lives of my informants, which goes to the very heart of why these images were destroyed. Namely, so that images of Suhar's family which contained unveiled women could not be seen by strangers. The intimacy that allowed me access to this knowledge also allowed me to obtain explicit permission to use the data as ethnographic evidence. That position of trust was given to me firstly, because of the shared experiences that are encompassed in fieldwork and secondly, because the way Mawiyah understood not only me but also the process I was undertaking was as a sympathetic medium. One of the consequences of her grown and growing religiosity was to put her in a position of constant reappraisal of her own biography in light of her evolving understanding of moral cause and effect. This shifting position contributed to the sense alterity with past selves, especially corporeal selves, discussed here. This speaks to Bouquet's (2001) discussion of described photographs in works of fiction as both invisible and agential (2001:86, 110). I assume as author that readers can in some respects 'see' the images from my descriptions in their 'mind's eye', and like Mawiyah and her family, I also wish to contextualise their content through a controlled narrative. The need to narrativise and contextualise is indicative of the manner in which Mawiyah in particular, but also all other informants, approached the troubling images of past selves. I would argue that in this context, moments of trauma and aspects of social change experienced, then constituted narratively in the 'mind's eye', bear witness to rather than purely judge, as the 'eyes'-eye' might.

For Mawiyah, her mother, her family and me, these photographs constitute(d) a very tangible form of evidence. To an anthropologist, they represented ethnographic evidence that linked with the narratives under discussion. For Suhar in particular, they were evidence of carnal bodies (especially hers) that should be concealed. For Mawiyah, they were evidence of the transformations experience and time had wrought on her fundamental self. For all, as material objects they obtained a particular value in what information they conveyed. Their currency relied not only on their content, but also on the very particular nature of how they displayed their

information. According to Barthes, the appeal of a photograph is its *punctum* and immediacy, a point in space and time that focuses attention (1981). Unlike narrative, a photograph presents all its information simultaneously (Barthes 1981:14). MacDougal (2006) extends this to argue that photographs offer a moment in which meanings emerge from present experience (2006:1). Although the viewer might be seeing the photographic image conceptually, metaphorically, linguistically or through another interpretative lens, they are always also seeing literally. Thus my ethnography takes seriously the logic embodied in the act of burning these photographs; that seeing them is problematic. MacDougal suggests that from seeing there is a direct link to knowing and this is at the core of why photographs are such valuable objects of evidence. Counter-evidence suggests that anthropologists cannot always gloss seeing as 'knowing' (Classen 1993; Taussig 1993) but rather occularcentric assertions are historically and socially specific ways of formulating knowledge accessibility (Jay 1994). The suggestion of the very direct link between certain types of seeing and knowing resonates with the problematic nature of such photographic images for Mawiyah and her family. The *punctum* of the image is too powerful and must be controlled. Despite the possibilities of orchestrating compositions and manipulation of image-making there is always an element which is 'out of control' (MacDougal 2006:4) and this has become differently apparent for my Syrian informants as moral codes and perception have altered through time.

This equation of seeing and knowing through the photographic image is complicated by the eschatological dimension of Suhar's concern. It is not only unknown men who might observe the carnal, unveiled and inappropriate attire of this family in the past; it is also God and specifically, God on the Day-of-Judgement. From the accounts of Suhar and Mawiyah, two elements of divine perception collide. Firstly, these images should not exist because 'we do not want to answer for these on the Day-of-Judgement', the proof of present regret changing understandings of the past. Concomitantly the destruction of the photographs illustrated a commitment to controlling problematic images in relation to the divine. Implied is an understanding about God's perception of time or at least one perception of time passing in a lineal fashion towards the Day-of-Judgement. This corresponds with the manner in which Mawiyah, Suhar and many other Damascenes I spoke to comprehended the divine

and how that translated into moral actions of cause and effect. To speak of God as omnipresent and omnipotent was problematic as this seemed to disrupt understandings of moral and cosmological causation. However, fixing God in time and space, the looming Day-of-Judgement excepted, was also regarded as problematic. Because *Allah* is ultimately unknowable, according to many of my informants, understanding and performing Qur'anic precepts of modesty was the closest one could get to knowing Him. At times, this appeared to be because God could only be his own referent; no description or analogy or physical object could or should be alluded to. This state is oddly comparable to Barthes' understanding of photographs' intrinsic, solely self-referential properties. The divine was never 'in' things, animate or inanimate, thus God's presence was often understood as defined by externality and specific placement in space. At other times, it was a distinct understanding of God situated in time and space, parallel to but separate from human action and in this way God was the ultimate witness. It was the constitution of the narrative towards God which shaped conduct, regard and attitude towards biography and therefore the evidential nature of the photographs for Mawiyah and Suhar.

Photographs: subjects of sensual history where memory & alterity collide

I now turn to the sensual and substantive qualities of the photographs that were destroyed in order to illustrate what their evidential character was doing. Many of these photographs I had seen before the evening of their demise. They had been shown to me in much the same way as with photographs from other families I had spent time with. Typically, they were brought to me, occasionally in albums but more commonly from a drawer in a sideboard or, after an anticipatory wait, from a bedroom as muddled sets in boxes. The act of viewing a photograph can be very intimate, especially if someone or several people are explaining to you its provenance, huddled around a rectangle of card often only around 15cm by 10cm or smaller. The experience can be sensory beyond the visual, encompassing the warmth of a close body and the brush of arms or hands. Furthermore, you are not just viewing an image of a past event but also the hands holding it, together with the

profile or expression of the person or people with whom the viewing is shared (Holland and Spence 1991). For me, this was often a close-up of eyelashes resting against the smooth cheekbone of a girl or young lady. Sometimes, it would be the careworn skin of a grandparent with the characteristic tang of olive soap. These haptic moments of communal viewing, touching and holding the photographic objects were both a result of and created intimacies between my informants themselves and with me. The haptic tactility of photographs highlights another form of 'knowing' to the visual outlined previously, which overlays possibly embracing, possibly contradicting the judgement of the 'eyes'-eye. Photographs exist in time and space 'enmeshed with subjective, embodied and sensuous interaction' (Edwards and Hart 2004:1) making the manner, context and condition of their presentation as important as the images themselves. Notably in Damascus, proffered photographs were not an instant response to my questions about weddings, life-stories and remembering family members. Slowly, I learnt that being shown photographs, especially in comparison to home or commissioned videos, was a sign that my motives had been recognised as benign if perplexing, making family photographs one of the most private realms I might access as a researcher.

On the evening the photographs were destroyed, Mawiyah and I had looked through them beforehand. After a meal of leftovers from the stove's hotplate, our conversation turned to families. Mawiyah's face lit up in remembrance and after some rummaging in her bags she proffered the wad of family photographs wrapped up in a plastic bag. She had visited her parents that day and her mother had given them to her. We looked through them, laughing at the funny faces some of the people had made unaware their picture was being taken. Most of the images were, as described, posed. This was true of nearly all the photographs members of various families showed me and insisted I take of them throughout my fieldwork. My questions to Mawiyah about chronology, 'Did that happen before that?' and 'Who got married first, them or them?' prompted her, with the pestering help of her son, to lay the photographs out for me in a kind of order, better to discuss the narrative I was clearly searching for, the basis for the family narratives previously discussed. Mawiyah spread them out in groups, a line of pools as if no one photograph could stand alone.

The practice of grouping associated photographs was common among the families I spent time with. Looking at older photos seemed to be an infrequent occupation but was a ritual that was relished when undertaken (though sharing recent images on mobile phones was more common). Most often, I would simply be shown groups of photographs with piles being sifted to find the related ones that encouraged sets of associations as I was shown them. Whilst I slowly worked through a pile in my hands or on a coffee table in front of me, family members would frantically search for the appropriate photographs in other piles, commenting and pulling faces as they flicked through images of themselves and their families. A photo of one family member at a party would require substantiation with other photographs revealing the same person in a selection of attire or posing with a range of family and friends. Often, each individual's biography was represented before moving on to another individual group or topic, reiterating the construction of past selves and others through this medium. An individual photograph was sometimes represented multiple times, as the pools of images briefly coalesced before rapidly whirling apart and reforming once again. Alternatively, in selections like Mawiyah's where often whole family groups were represented, event types were discriminated. Holidays were grouped and so were weddings, other social events such as parties and picnics clustered. More individual or intimate photographs of people dressed ready for an interview or at home were grouped despite spanning a decade or more. On this occasion, Mawiyah obligingly ordered the clusters chronologically to help me understand better her family's past. As the oil heater dripped and burned, the aroma of the chestnuts resting on its hotplate mingling with and gradually overwhelming the diesel fumes, we went through all the photographs. The experience was sensory in many ways, from the space of the room with its warmth and smell, to the fidgets of the child clambering to sit within first my arms then his mother's and then occupied elsewhere. Most evocative were the sounds of remembering, the gurgles of laughter for past joys, the sighs of regret and finally, the photographs themselves that suggested their own sensory past.

Mawiyah's photographs addressed the past, history and change not only through their image content and the narratives told about them but also in their own physical form; the chronologically-blurred transition from monochrome to colour,

from the grainy card to the shiny reflective, plastic surface speaks instantly of technological changes and a family's relations to those changes. Moreover, as individual objects they suggest their own past uses. Some of the photographs, notably the older ones from the 1950s, had clearly once been framed; bands of crisp high contrast still outlined fading central images. Others were more tattered and bent, suggesting repeated handling and repeated gazing. The photographs I had already seen were among the most worn, with fraying edges and a crackle-glaze of bends, perhaps because these conveyed appropriate images to show and to use as a family referent. The photographic objects' condition acted as shorthand to layers of privacy and intimacy within the family. Interestingly, two photographs I had not seen previously and which certainly had not been presented as part of family narratives discussed on earlier occasions, were also worn from handling/viewing; one showed the sisters in their fashionable clothes, the other was the photograph that survived the subsequent purge: Mawiyah lifted by her brother. I was only made aware that I was partaking in a process of seeing these photographs that had been enacted by others many times before, and left with an imprint far beyond the images they held, by this recognition.

Alterity: gaps, cuts and past incarnations

The photographs under discussion spoke as much via the gaps implicit and their soon-to-be-held status as an absence themselves, as they did from the images of family and past they depicted. These particular photographs only represented a snapshot of a wider selection of family photographs and albums. Many of the companion images to the various occasions alluded to in the family history outlined, I had beheld while spending time with this family and collecting 'life-histories'. The photographs that were not to be culled represented children in the largest part; others depicted formal compositions of men, alone or in small groups, often in military uniform or other work-related attire. A final category comprised images of women whose comportment and dress met with the family's current prescribed standards (only a band of forehead and the top bridge of the nose showing behind dark glasses, all else including hands covered in black cloth). These photographs were not

problematic enough, or at all, to warrant annihilation. They represented a satisfactory image of family life and posed no future threat to virtue, modesty and answerability to God if seen by strangers. The prevalence of women in family images meant that once edited, the collection contained quite conspicuous gaps. Issues of photographs transgressing public and private, and who controls photos, speak to older debates about who controls the shape and location of the private realm (Rosaldo 1974; Reiter 1975; Abu-Lughod 1986). In the case of this kind of control, the intimate selving and connectivity with others including one's past self become replaced by intimate 'othering'. Instead of the networks photographs might be hoped to create across time and space, networks to past and in some instances present selves and others become cut, and boundaries become apparent (Strathern 1996). As Bouquet points out, it is often through these types of control, where delineations are made, that family snaps appear as explicit forms of kinship 'substance'. In particular contexts, photographs share qualities with kin members as being both storage vessels and a kind of substance of kinship.

To access the significance of photographs as a form of kinship substance it is apposite to comprehend the 'plot' of the narratives which they point to. This requires going beyond the processes of social history they convey to consider the particularity of what is at stake which makes their content so troublesome. Photographic destruction and its control is only one thread of absence of the overlapping stories that are told through the process of editing these photographic objects. The actual photographic images and pictures they represent belie an intertwined and somewhat darker narrative. Within the last third of the collection of deceased photographs, there is an absence. Mawiyah is a prominent character throughout the earlier images, as a child, a performing teenager and a young woman. Her character was encapsulated in the images that portrayed her. Her manner was strong and she stared confidently into the camera, unlike some of her siblings and cousins who appeared coy and reserved in comparison. Like most photographic images of Syrians, she was almost always posed in these pictures. However, strikingly her poses tended to be active or self-referential, self-consciously struck for the camera with chin tilted slightly defiant and her gaze direct. In a rare few unposed photographs she was so enthralled in her task, be it flying a kite, arranging a display of food or screeching

with joy, the moment was made tangible through the image of her physicality. Then suddenly she disappeared from the photographic record of this family. Her absence was made conspicuous through a selection of photographs from the early 1980s where her mother stood surrounded by a horde of teenage and smaller children on seaside promenades and boats, in the coastal resort of Latakia in the north of Syria. It is only several years later that she reappears in the one photograph of the three sisters, returned briefly to their previous unity. On first inspection, within this photographic image she appears as she had before, her arm loosely resting on a sister's waist. However, with biographical hindsight I was aware of the signs of stress on her face within the picture, of her relative conformity with her two sisters rather than her previously usual stance as a noticeably active figure within the frame.

When first shown some of these photographs as part of interviews and life-story collection, I had been mildly struck by Mawiyah's absence. I supposed that this was because she had been focused on study or work since I already knew she had been precocious. Perhaps, I speculated, she had become the family photographer, the chosen instigator and creator as she was now the designated destroyer. Slowly, however, another possibility emerged and was eventually confirmed as I learnt more about Mawiyah's own life history. It had been her daughter Aamal who had brought up Mawiyah's biography, explaining that she had been married three times; however, most of their family thought she had married only twice. She began the story like a classic tragedy with a re-iteration of her mother's talents as if Mawiyah was not there, even though she was actually in the room clearing space for the evening meal:

You know I told you how my mama taught me to dance? She showed me everything when I was a child... it was my dear mother who taught me all of the Arab dances and European dances too. When she was at school she was always dancing, she got told off at school once for dancing on the table... [at this Mawiyah laughed throatily and showed me some of her moves] 'Yes, I said. 'I'm John Travolta! John Travolta!' (she explained causing Aamal to giggle and tease her) ... Bravo! Bravo ya Mama!... not Travolta! Travolta, John Travolta inti hobla (are you a dummy (colloq.))?... yanī (I mean) she

was crazy! She played sport too, basketball. But then you know she was at college and she had a fiancée, I mean a love – a forbidden love. They got married, they eloped... I think he was handsome that was the reason. But his family didn't like it... you know about Arab marriage... they didn't want my mother (Aamal looked disgusted and indignant for her mother). After a year it was broken. They made him, his mother made him. He went back to his family and married someone else. You know, someone they chose. That was mama's first marriage.

To have eloped at 17 and have been divorced at 18 is, within Syria, highly problematic. By 18, Mawiyah had not only disobeyed her family, she had also become a divorced woman. However, the story is more complicated. This area of biography is sensitive. Although I heard the story initially from Aamal, it seems more appropriate to tell it from Mawiyah's perspective, which she recounted to me on several occasions; sometimes with obvious pain, sometimes with jubilation at an unexpected outcome, illustrating the contextualised nature of memory recollection and narratives. Here is what I noted she said when she was explaining the provenance of the photographs under discussion and her absence from this family record:

Eventually after six months my husband broke it (the marriage), he divorced me. So then I had to give my son Basil to them (his family). I went to the hospital to give birth and the doctor asked me if I wanted to hold the baby boy but I told them 'No, you do not feel love for a child you have not cuddled in your arms'. I did not see Basil until I saw him on the street three years ago and I knew it was him. He looked just like my husband when he was young. I was told he was in Homs but really he was only in the next district all the time. Now he is married, yes! And has a daughter. She is called Luna, do you know what Luna means? Yes, my moon.

The second section of her brief summary of what must have been an extremely complicated and painful period of her life brightened her downcast face. Repeatedly, she explained the fate of having *found* her long-lost eldest son in a neighbouring area while with her youngest son, who is the same age as her also newly discovered granddaughter. Within this there are some interesting points about kinship that I think help to extract and extrapolate this ambivalence and changeability by layers of recollection. This element of the narrative brings into focus Mawiyah's absence from later photographs and personal concerns around morality and answerability on the Day-of-Judgement. However much she was able to account for and defend her choices, she was also sometimes volubly wracked with doubt about her past and the way she had followed 'bodily desires' (*raghabāt*) over concern of her 'personal and social soul' (*nafs /nafsiyya (colloq.)*). It highlights possible reasons for the fraught and power-laden relationship between Mawiyah and Suhar, who by several accounts had worked hard to prevent Mawiyah's elopement and divorce from damaging her family and Mawiyah's later prospects. Mawiyah made it clear that these events had changed her, caused her to reflect on her own religiosity through experience. Although accounting for its personal impact is beyond anthropology, her self expression was one of reflection and alterity. The narrative of her transgression brings into focus the complex power-laden relationship she had with her mother, adding another layer to why she, rather than another sibling, was chosen as the destroyer of these images³.

My questions about whether she missed or had looked for the baby she had lost due to the unfortunate outcome of her illicit elopement, were always met with the same response she had given the doctors at the hospital. 'No, you can't love a child you have never cuddled and fed'. This stand was also supported by Aamal who

³ Mawiyah was often instructed to conduct ambiguous or arduous work for her family and this burning was only one instance in which she was requested to do something that was not wholly pleasant for her by her mother. When one of her brothers was detained by the police, it was she who was asked to go and negotiate bail. Conversely, she was often asked to scout out prospective brides and grooms. One reason she offered was that her bad experiences had taught her what to look out for. She was also called upon to care for her father in the last months of his illness, a task her siblings were unwilling to do. Her position of jeopardy meant that, in many instances, this was the primary way she was able to access her natal family. Her predicament during fieldwork seemed to be in contrast to her prominence in her family as illustrated in the photographs before the catalogue of events she so bitterly regretted.

repeated it in a manner that suggested she regarded this as common knowledge, tutting at my naivety when I suggested otherwise. When I recounted this to sympathetic Syrian ears, though shocked by the events of the story they concurred that if she had not even touched her son, let alone fed it at her breast, then she would not feel the loss profoundly. Regardless of whether this reflects actual maternal sentiments as experienced, cultural rhetoric or interplay between the two, it is indicative of the strong emphasis placed on a very particular constellation of paternity, maternity and corporeal, haptic qualities within Syrian kinship. This encompasses but extends beyond features illustrated by recorded tropes such as ‘milk-kinship’: the kinship and an incest taboo made through the sharing of breast milk by children who would otherwise be considered non-kin enough to marry (Parkes 2005; Clarke 2009). That Mawiyah’s not touching or feeding her child was considered significant indicates that mother-child relations are networks mediated by substances which can be controlled to an extent. Yet the dislocation she felt with her son at birth did not prevent her from attempting to kindle a relationship when she found him in later life. The generative qualities potentially contained in producing children and photographs contain related, though differently scaled, notions of evidence, corporeality, substance and possibility. Photographs and children both offer the means of storage of oneself in another which can accommodate breaking points and ongoing possibilities simultaneously. However, the comparison and parallels only go so far and should not be conflated, which can be illustrated by the different modalities of time, memory and hope they contain. The cuts and gaps made through photographs and their destruction are not the same as the implied relationship between estranged mother and child. The photos and their demise were firmly seated in the past or nestled in the mind’s-eye; ‘All the memories are here’. While the kinship between mother and child always contains the potential for the future; ‘Yes, my moon, my granddaughter’.

Immediate prelude

Of course, Mawiyah did not have only one child. Just as Suhar’s cross-subjectivity with Mawiyah was effectively different from that of Mawiyah’s brothers and sisters,

so too was Mawiyah's cross-subjectivity with her sons and daughters, whom she treated distinctly. Thus future contingency, different but not totally detached from Suhar's reckoning with mortality, and Mawiyah's ambivalence with her past, filtered into her relationship with Aamal. This biographically- and historically-constituted specificity of their cross-subjectivity is illustrated by the events that immediately preceded and followed the burning of the photographs. After Mawiyah wove her narratives through the photographs on the evening prior to their burning, her daughter Aamal came home later than expected. She had been out with Adnan, the son of one of Mawiyah's childhood friends. Adnan and Aamal had been engaged three years previously, a situation orchestrated by their mothers. Adnan wished to renew this engagement, which had been broken when Mawiyah had observed his cruelty to his younger sister and decided she could not allow Aamal to marry him. At the time, this had alienated Mawiyah from her long-term friend and contributed to her own marital problems before her second divorce. When Aamal returned home and Mawiyah guessed her whereabouts, they rowed fiercely about propriety, at one point Mawiyah saying she would burn the photos. This was the first time Aamal had heard about her grandmother's (and to a lesser extent mother's) wish and this enraged her, leading her to accuse Mawiyah and Suhar of 'craziness'. Aamal was so maddened and disgusted that after loud appeals and accusation she left to spend the night with friends, an unusual action on her part despite constant tension between mother and daughter. After the row, Mawiyah sat on her cold grey step and burnt the images one by one. Later still, when she was finished, her rage spent, she sobbed to me, 'I just don't want her to end up like me... like this'. In that moment, it became apparent that the reasons behind the destruction of the photographs and the editing of family narrative extended beyond the religious sentiment shared between Mawiyah and her mother and were deeply nested in the complicated and problematic narrative the images both showed and glossed over. The act of destruction itself contained elements of maternal control, over Mawiyah by Suhar as a form of penance for previous transgressions, and release of Mawiyah's anger at her daughter Aamal as refracted through her own biography and experience.

Conclusion

Photographs exist on multiple levels: as material objects; as reproduced images which transcend the physical material; and as concepts and shapers of imaginations, not least as objects of memory. For my Damascene informants, photographs are not the endpoint but act as objects of ‘history’ or rather ‘historicisation’. As stand-alone objects and images, these photographs are intriguing but they confer ethnographic meaning only when contextualised as moments in the past and as objects of remembering or forgetting. Their burning is indicative of an active process of historicisation of a family and the self. The photographs can be seen as objects of history, the act of manipulating their fates a process of cultural curation. By this I mean that an ongoing process of inscription, healing, guardianship and editing became visible and instrumental. They illustrate not only a family’s retrospective, narrative insertion into events that constitute Syrian Middle Eastern and global attested history, but also illustrate the active choices made by this family that have contributed to social change. In this case, the most evident is signalled by their escatalogical concerns; the shift in registers towards a more committed, active and corporeal religious Islam.

The photographs act as a doorway into the lives of this family and other families with whom I conducted fieldwork, set in their own particular history and how that reflects a broader social, economic and political history that surrounds them. Thus two linked threads unfold from exploring these now deceased photographs. One is about the past; the other is about the present at the time of the photograph burning, contained within the immediate past of the event. Both are linked to the future and beyond. This supports a temporal view of history as a cultural artefact continually refashioned to accord with new needs. The ethnographic layering of perception, whereby the images and photographic objects were sensorial evidence of past kinship, history and time, gives us purchase on the links Damascenes make between biographical events and historical time. By exploring the content, (auto)biographies and narratives told around these photographs, I show how and why they *had* to be destroyed, as images and objects of memory. The last section, however, suggests that it is through these photographs and their burning that

‘present’ concerns are impinged on by acts of narrative memory and how the individual and the family are situated in and instrumental to ‘historical time’. The role played by photos in this process was dependent on a constellation of mortality (the impending eschaton), knowing, controlling and cutting family links, and successive sets of mother-daughter relations. This shows how cross-subjectivity and connectivity between family members is refracted through temporality and suggests that the memorial and generative capacities of kinship dynamics makes us aware of the reasons why guardianship of potent biographical objects like photographs is as much about confrontation with past selves for present and future evidence as it is about answerability on the Day-of-Judgement.

The intersection of photographs as a form of kinship evidence shows the possible problem of evidence when unmediated by an appropriate narrative. Thus how the members of this family interacted with past selves was contingent on the contexts that abound in the narratives their pasts contain. Finally, from the narrative content of this example, I draw a parallel between photographs as kinship substance, and the complication of kinship connectivity between mother and child. This illustrates the different temporal capacities and potentialities of connection objects, persons and memories contained for my informants

Chapter 2.

The Time & Work of Becoming Married:

‘The coincidence was better than a thousand appointments’

My hostess Leena was newly married and so I inquired as to her wedding celebrations and experience. Immediately, she fetched a DVD and for the next hour we watched a video that focused almost exclusively on her as a bride. As is common in contemporary Damascus, her wedding had been sex-segregated; while the men attended a low-key religious event at the mosque, the bride was the centre of an all-female celebration which even the groom would only join at the very end, if at all (see Tapper 1998/1999; Salamandra 2004:3). In her wedding dress of revealing white lace and make-up, she was unrecognisable from the teenager who sat curled up in jeans, t-shirt and house-slippers on a soft chair in front of me. The only evidence of her recent nuptials, visible as she pushed aside strands of dark hair, were grown-out remnants behind her ears of the blond highlights inserted for the event. At the beginning of the film, so typical of the many I watched and of middle-class weddings I encountered during my fieldwork, loud percussive music set the scene of celebration. This mingled with the sounds of her short bridal procession (*zaffat* ‘*arūs*) down a palm-colonnaded drive¹, accompanied by the ululating female guests, and by her brothers as far as the wedding venue’s entrance. Her procession was marked by a professional troupe of sword-dancers/fighters (*melowiyya* / ‘*arāda* (colloq.)), who were goaded on by her new mother-in-law in their call and response songs which signify the agnatic tensions of her shift from daughter to wife.

Throughout the video, Leena was depicted either ‘in action’ (greeting guests, displaying gifts from family members and dancing), or she was sat uneasily on a

¹ Some venues set off main roads include a length of drive especially for the entrance of the bride and then groom, so they might replicate forms of processing which until recently were performed in the street. Less wealthy families do sometimes process to the house where a wedding is taking place but due to concerns of modesty this I was told (and observed in comparison to the early 2000s) is much reduced with brides often only processing between adjacent buildings or flats. Instead emphasis is now placed on what is jokingly called *zaffat as-sayyāra*, the post-wedding procession of cars competing to be in front and honking their horns, which punctuate the spring and summer evenings for all to hear. For a good discussion of the shift from the street *zaffat* to the hotel *zaffat* procession in Cairo, see Kent and Franken (1998).

slight platform from which she could observe her relatives, old and new, dance before her while they too gazed upon her doll-like make-up, finery and composure. Periodically, the image would be frozen so that for as long as 20 seconds, a still would be displayed focusing on her face and décolletage, this overlaying scenes of her dancing guests. The overall narrative of the wedding video loosely followed the order of events; however the film image was effects-laden to create a very distinct set of edited images and blurring of time. A sequence depicting the bride dancing alone surrounded by the guests, awkward in high heels and fishtail skirt, would be frozen. The camera would zoom in to her face, presumably seeking the most appropriate facial pose (apparently beatific rapture, although sometimes only startled horror was available). Then instead of the flow of images continuing in sequence to conclude her dancing, this held image would be juxtaposed with other stills of the bride, firstly displaying her gifts (gold jewellery) and secondly posing apprehensively while leaning over an expensive-looking new car; a very direct association of brides with valued objects and prestige. A series of cross-dissolves and screen-wipes was utilised to create a filmic montage that was explicitly more than just a direct representation of parts of this woman's wedding day. As with most Damascene wedding videos, this film was designed to be shown not to nosy strangers like me but to those women who had actually attended the wedding, and it needed to convey correctly the place of the bride in the midst of her more relaxed female kin and gifts they had bestowed on her and her husband. Depending on the sexual moral code of the families and the relatedness of bride and groom, the groom was often the only man to watch such a video².

The wedding video is an essential part of the process of contemporary Damascene wedding celebrations. Ranging from full professional production to the use of mobile phones and hired cameras by relatives, videos capture the celebratory nature of the event and the great effort imbued in creating contextual and bodily aesthetics. As Tapper (1998/99) notes, in the Middle East, weddings offer a primary site of explicit cultural representation. Her discussion of wealthy Damascene weddings, like that of Salamandra (2004), emphasises the importance of displays of

² Excepting of course the film-makers and editors whose selection was carefully vetted, a job increasingly performed by women who see a lucrative niche in the market.

conspicuous consumption. As she points out, ‘marriage ceremonies throughout most of the Arab World continue to have a prominence which is commensurate with the centrality of the institution of marriage itself, while weddings offer the most elaborate and complex expressions of ritual symbolism and action in these societies’ (1998/99:121). Marriage among the wealthy in Damascus has been seen as a process characterised by several ritualised events and transitions in which gifts, especially gold, are prominently exchanged and displayed (Salamandra 2004; Reedy 2006). This paints a portrait of an exchange process where families actively encourage these material concerns and efforts of family distinction (Salamandra 2004). For the middle- and working-class families on whom I focused, wedding videos also evidenced practices of social distinction, and it was often through the machinations of marriage that nuances of wealth and social standing were made evident and negotiated. But not all aspects of the process of getting married are necessarily filmed or evident from the intense displays of beatific celebration of the wedding event itself. Tellingly, the watching and re-watching of the wedding video, especially by guests who attended the event, marks the later stages of a process of work, negotiation, transactions and performance. Although it is often the repeated witnessing of the final celebration that marks the process of becoming married as



The conspicuous consumption associated with marriage in Damascus is illustrated by the elaborate sets of dresses for brides and female guests which dominate city centre retail display windows.

complete, many couples and families I spent time with felt it was only after the successful birth of their first child that they were considered by neighbours, friends, family and even themselves as actually married and concomitantly adult. In this way, as the *zaffat* 'arūs and the entrance of the groom in the wedding event echo, there is a distinct processual nature in the transition from unmarried to married which actualises the changes in roles and statuses which it demarcates (Hockey and James 2003).

In this chapter, I explore the process of becoming married as a rite of passage and processual transition which is contingent on the choices, actions and potentialities of the bride and groom at the centre of a web of cross-generational kin relations. The marital practices of Damascus, in particular those of the elite, are documented in the anthropological literature as elaborate and competitive (Tapper 1998/1999; Salamandra 2004). A key figure in these performances of distinction is the mother of the groom who is also portrayed as central to the processes of bridal selection and socialisation. Described by Salamandra as the 'director' of events and proceedings, the mother of the groom is presented as dominating the important processes around the reproduction of the family, resonant with Kandiyoti's (1988; 1991) formulation of the 'patriarchal bargain'. In Kandiyoti's schema, women find status as they age through the connection and control they have over their sons and eventually their son's families. In this way, marriage is presented as a process contingent on a three-way relationship between mother, son and daughter-in-law, whereby senior female instrumentality is made visible and tense age/gender power dynamics are reproduced along with the family (Kandiyoti 1991:31). This model de-emphasises the roles played by wider kin networks, particularly those of the prospective bride.

Looking beyond the Damascene literature, wider writings on marriage within the Middle East have stressed the socio-economic and historical contingency of marriage patterns more generally (Rugh 1984; White 1994; Moors 1995; Singerman 1995; Hoodfar 1997). This work argues that attention needs to be placed not only on the ceremonial aspects and the patriarchal structuring of marriage but also on the contexts which govern the parameters of choice and potential in Middle Eastern marriage. Some of these works have picked up on trends which suggest marital age is

increasing not only because of changing social values, such as female educational attainment, but also because of financial constraints leading to an ambivalent period where adulthood cannot be obtained due to lack of marriage and subsequent children (Singerman 2007:6). This ambiguous period of early (or not so early), frequently unemployed, and unmarried adulthood has been termed by academic and wider commentators alike a period of 'waithood' (see Singerman 2007:6; Dhillon, Dyer and Yousef 2009:16; Assaad et al, 2009:229; Dhillon and Salehi-Isfahani 2009:248). 'Waithood' is often described as a phase of life which places 'young people in an adolescent, liminal world where they are neither children nor adults' (Singerman 2007:6) and one of several identified repercussions of delayed marriage has been the emergence of 'generational conflict' within and beyond the family. Such a model allows for a means by which historical context may precipitate social change through generational tensions, but underplays the interlocking of life-courses and resultant generational reproduction of kinship patterns which gave initial meaning to liminality as an anthropological concept.

The instrumental role of the groom's mother as described in the 'patriarchal bargain', and the changing pressures of financing and achieving marriage as characterised within 'waithood', are each borne out by my Damascene ethnography. Yet in other important respects each is complicated by the marriage practices of my informants and ultimately embody a contradiction centred around the idea of 'dependency'. While the former presents dependency between parent and child as integral to the processual reproduction of kinship, the latter regards such dependency in a destructive light, creating a generational schism between what is past and what is to come. Here, I wish to examine how and why these related but different understandings of 'dependency' come together at the point of negotiating a marriage. By charting the time and work invested in becoming married, other senior family members as well as the groom's mother are shown to be crucial determinants of successful transition, supplementing Kandiyoti's model of patriarchy and revealing further kin-specific inter-generational concerns towards personal and familial security for the future. We may therefore consider Damascene marriage as a processual realisation of steps which depends on inter-generational intervention rhetorics of certainty and uncertainty. I suggest these are not only historically

emergent but also dependent on the layering of several familial generations' experiences and choices, which temper the generational conflict implied by work on 'waithood'. These experiences and choices reflect person- and role-specific concerns with familial (re)production and mortality, imbuing the process of becoming married with familial temporality. Thus marriage is dependent on the intersection of older generations and their past experiences, and biographical accounts are actively used as evidence in the process by them and their junior kin. In this way, marriage shapes and relies on the intersection of a complex array of temporal-generational dispositions. Rather than casting the time and work involved in marriage only in negative terms of problematic socio-economic change, I attend to the role they have in shaping the new conjugal 'unit' and the way positive and negative spaces of familial 'liminality' are framed in Damascus. This highlights how marriage is understood by informants as a process which attempts to contend with the problems of predicting the future, by searching for positive examples and evidence. In other words, 'liminality' may be seen not only negatively as an arena for destructive generational tension, but also as an important period in a rite of passage with its own processual elements that help the transition from dependent childhood to responsible adulthood (Turner 1969; Peteet 1994; Jean-Klein 2000).

Rhetoric of certainty & sentiments of uncertainty: Damascene approaches to 'waithood'.

In the introduction to this thesis, I highlighted the demographic circumstances of contemporary Syria, whereby the population is heavily skewed towards the under-thirties, as an important reason for considering the meaning of generational and temporal relationships. One of the corollaries of the Middle East's demographic peak has been identified as an increasing delay in the age of first marriage, especially for men, as competition has increased for limited employment opportunities and familial resources. Singerman argues that 'The consequences and meaning of the Youth Bulge in the region... can only be fully comprehended if we examine the political economy of youth through the 'marriage imperative'' (2007:5) by which she means the interrelationship between economic resources and marriage practice. The

financial burden which Singerman identifies for Egypt also holds true for Damascus, where many of my informants complained of the inflated cost of marriage, and standardised inventories of the cost far outstripped the earning capacity of the poor. At the time of fieldwork, it was presumed that an average Syrian bride and her family might expect a potential groom to be able to provide: a *mahr* (a marriage prestation, regularly estimated by my interviewees as requiring 200,000 SYP up front and proof of the availability of a similar sum or more later³); an elaborate wedding (often in the region of 100,000 SYP); a suitable income to support a family; increasingly a separate home, and ideally a car. Thus a minimum package estimated by my informants, without a private home and a car, of about 400,000 SYP, for those with an income less than 10,000 SYP a month would require the entirety of their salary for 40 months. Those who were not wealthy or did not have generous wealthy relatives had, therefore, to find ways of availing themselves of the relevant capital and assets, whilst also ensuring that their 'investment' was worthwhile. This meant that sometimes young men and their families had to make sacrifices in other areas of their lives, prioritising the importance of money-making over wider concerns for family cohesion and what they deemed 'Islamic' moral behaviour. It might also entail ambiguous long periods of absence from Syria as they 'sought their fortune' in countries with more economic possibilities such as Lebanon, the US or UAE, leading to the centrifugal dispersion of young men away from Syria. Herein lay a quandary: building up material capital for marriage via some activities, notably working in the banking and associated sectors or denying family one's presence, could easily result in a loss of immaterial capital around honour, character and moral position, personal states central to marriagability. These material requirements and constraints were accompanied by a discourse among many young men and sometimes their female kin about the idle laziness of young Syrian women who 'just spend all day sleeping, watching television and painting their nails'. Despite the vehemence of these comments, it is important to note that they were not extended to 'women' generally

³ This sum may have varied considerably across Syria and among different socio-economic groups, however it was surprising how consistent the figures were estimated at amongst the largely medium and lower socio-economic group I focused on. At the time of research 200,000 SYP was equivalent to around 2,700 GBP.

such as mothers and other female kin as a category, but specifically referred to those young eligible brides who might receive the fruits of their hard work.



A Bank Audi advertising campaign attempted to harness fears about delayed marriage during my fieldwork. The sentiment of the caption is 'Left it too late?' encouraging people to take out loans

With so much at stake materially, potential brides and their families required ways of navigating competing models and narratives that came from within their families, their local society and its past, religious interpretation and the wider international networks that they relied on, to decide what a 'good' husband, a 'good' marriage and a 'good' future might comprise. One elaboration of the contradictions a potential bride might face when deciding on a suitable partner was offered to me by Ratoul, a young woman of 19 who had rejected 11 suitors in the previous year and a half, and here she explains why;

Well, I have this very special question which is 'why do you want to marry me?' It seems a simple question but you know most tell me 'for the sake of getting married and being married' they think

it is time to settle down so they want to do so with a beautiful girl. They are not thinking about the future really and they are not thinking about me. I want a partner, it's so great when you have someone who can share with you, you know, really create a family and this is what I have seen with my parents. If you want your children to be successful this is what you need, devotion and work from your husband, you need to do it together, so you want a man who sees you, wants you because you are clever and good. Like I don't want a mahr...you're not an object you know!?!'

For many people, it's all about money and diamonds, lots of men have bought me some pretty sweet gifts, but I don't want them, no. When I find someone, when we want to get married we want to grow up together... I'm not really looking for marriage, I'm looking for a mind. I will have to like his mind before I like him. I want someone to pray with, to stand in front of God with, someone to be my house. If I know someone is honest I should accept. You should accept and if you don't accept then you will bring destruction down to the whole society...

Maybe my expectation is too high, I just have the example of the Prophet, peace be upon him.

Ratoul was resisting what she perceived as her 'objectification' as a beautiful girl by rejecting the *mahr*. By using the dual examples of her parents and the Prophet to shape her aspirations, she formulated an ideal husband who would be her 'house', a very different kind of object and a mind which is capable of devotion and work. Ratoul was in a fortunate position as she was beautiful, educated, religious and from an economically secure family that allowed her to be picky in a way most young Syrian women cannot risk. However, even she was mindful that such high expectations might not materialise: 'I sometimes worry that if I leave it too long there will be no chance'. Two of her close friends, one of whom had divorced, ruefully said that her aspirations were unrealistic, pointing out that anyone who expected a groom to be the Prophet Muhammad was bound to be disappointed.

Within her explanation, Ratoul recognises a contradiction between her personal wants, desires and aspirations and her self-image as a young Muslim woman who should accept someone honest lest ‘society’s destruction’ be placed on her shoulders. A heavy burden regardless of beauty, brains and wealth, she openly appreciated the advice of her more phlegmatic friends.

Among my informants, ‘waithood’ was most evident in the juxtaposition between the manner in which they expressed the rhetorics of marriage’s certainty versus their fears of its uncertainty and contingency. In its simplest formulation marriage was continuously portrayed and discussed as universally inevitable. When I asked young Syrians what they expected and/or wanted in the future, regardless of my emphasis in the question⁴ they would reply without batting an eyelid ‘to be married with a family, a house and a car’. Rarely did the content or order change. Yet the solidity and straightforwardness of the statement was continuously undermined by the profound doubt and worry that the same individuals voiced about their personal ability/eligibility to marry⁵. Such doubts are not addressed in the bulk of classic theorising on practices of marriage in the Middle East, dominated as they are by works that posit the place of marriage practices within segmentary lineage systems (Barth 1954:171; Gellner 1969; Asad 1972; Dresch 1988), or focus on the symbolism inherent in the celebrations themselves (Granqvist 1931; Meneley 1996; Tapper 1998/1999). Some accounts of marriage practices do emphasise the negotiated elements of both courtship/arrangement of a union, the wedding and subsequent marriage (Watson 1994; Moors 1995; Hoodfar 1997; Salamandra 2004), and recent work on the socio-political context of ‘waithood’ is framed largely in terms of doubt and strain. These later works tend to understand marriage as fundamental to Middle Eastern kinship and sociality with limitations external to families; they rarely probe more individual concerns about ability to marry. For my informants, the bravado with which they articulated the certainty of becoming a married person cloaked like a heavy layer of rhetorical dust the profound personal

⁴ By this I mean how I had led up to questions about the future, whether our conversation/interview had focused on study and work, or family or other aspects of political and daily life.

⁵ Some people did not display this doubt. However nearly everyone with whom I spent extended periods of time would express concern, regardless of their initial confidence.

concerns and fears of the unmarried and their families⁶. Although the practices and contingencies of becoming married and everyday married life were glossed as ‘simple’ (*beṣīta* (*colloq.*)), all of the marriage processes I observed required a substantial amount of work and focus.

Discrepancy between social certainty and personal doubt was tellingly echoed by the manner in which many married informants would slip during a narrative, prompted by questions about their experiences, from describing ‘my wedding’ in the first person past tense to ‘a wedding’ in the second or third person, present tense. This shift in register is indicative of the inherent tensions between ‘the wedding’ as an expression of successful work and ‘the bride’ as a problem category containing the ambiguities of reaching the point of marriage and the performance of actually completing a marriage through children and longevity. Conversely, the process of courtship, regardless of the level of family interventions and arrangement, was often remembered and narrativised in quite specific detail. Any perceived slights, setbacks or tenderness were often described very thoroughly, sometimes eliciting strong emotions even after 50 years. This contrast suggests a longer-standing schism between the process and the event of marriage than is suggested by the work on ‘waithood’, which frames the past as containing a normative model of relatively harmonious and manageable marital practices.

The contradiction of rhetorics and sentiments makes more sense when we understand that evidence is drawn from a diverse array of sources and that although financial issues are imperative, they can also be used as metaphors for and to express other concerns. Layered upon and throughout these material concerns are Damascene ideas about and relations to one’s own familial past, which represent central components of the specific events and practices that take place during the process of moving from being unmarried to married and directly affirm their meaning to those involved. This process stresses the importance of time in understanding the relationship between what might be categorised as economic and reproductive strategies (Robertson 1991:71), the intertwined nature of which is itself causally

⁶ My own marriage in the middle of my fieldwork triggered a palpable shift in the way I was treated and the information I was party to, giving me some sense of the importance and desirability of the shift from unmarried to married. I was also made aware, however, that being married in itself conferred a status of sexual potential rather than the realization of greater adulthood that comes with producing and providing for legitimate children.

important in the way Damascenes make decisions to undertake new marriages. Stretching forwards and back, individuals often separate out long-term and short-term considerations in order to compare and balance possible outcomes. However, these temporal perspectives can then be sewn together in innovative ways to make decisions and solutions which a purely synchronic or ritual-based analysis struggles to tackle. Here I present ethnography that compares two very different attempts at marriage negotiation, one that was successful and one that did not materialise. Izrah and Muhannad were at the time of fieldwork expecting their first child; in this state of relative security, they and their family members were surprisingly candid in their accounts of the reticence and tensions of their courtship. In comparison, Aamal's stop-start engagement with Adnan suggests the limitations imposed when the support networks and contingencies of marriage were for some reason hard to activate. By comparing a more 'ideal type' and successful marriage with one that never materialised, I aim to convey the complexity of Damascene practices and concepts that surround marriage in reference to the particular context in which they are produced.

Courting, betrothal & situating expectations

Izrah

In the spring of Izrah's 18th year, she was studying English Literature at Damascus University. Travelling home with her friend one day to the suburb of Darayya, she became aware that she was being followed by a 'nicely dressed man'. She saw this man again a week later in the departmental administrator's office and noted how he averted his eyes rather than 'ogling' (*talṭīsh (colloq.)*). The next day, one of the secretaries from the office spoke to her, announcing, 'My dear, I have a groom for you', explaining that her nephew Muhannad had seen Izrah at the University when visiting her. The secretary asked if Izrah might like to meet this man and if they could contact Izrah's mother and father. Because the young man's aunt was 'so sweet she obviously came from a good family', Izrah assented. That evening, her mother told her the (potential) groom's family had already contacted her family, which was a sure sign of how keen they were (or he was), and they had arranged to

visit a few days later. Upon their arrival Izrah ‘felt awkward’ and went to make sweet black coffee to make a good impression. Muhannad’s visiting family comprised of his mother, his eldest sister, his maternal aunt who had helped with the introduction, and his uncle because his father had died of a stroke the previous year. On first impressions, Izrah found her potential mother-in-law rather ‘intimidating’. Whilst Muhannad’s aunt and sister engaged enthusiastically in small talk, complimenting Izrah on her coffee and demeanour, Muhannad’s mother remained speculative, as if she regarded her as ‘below her son’.

After the initial meeting, Izrah was sure that Muhannad’s mother would veto any match and began to worry that perhaps her appearance and lower middle-class background meant she would never marry. She berated herself for being too picky, comparing her predicament with that of the heroines she studied in her literature course and those on the more serious television dramas, like *yus’al rūḥek* (colloq., ‘Ask Your Spirit’) and *heik tejauzna* (colloq., ‘So We Married’). At 18, she felt that she had received relatively few offers of marriage, Muhannad being only her third speculative groom. In her first year at University, she had experienced a brief romance with a fellow student. Their meetings had largely been confined to the university campus and after the initial enchantment of flattery, she had come to realise that he was ‘silly and did not behave modestly enough to make a good match’. Pragmatically she decided that she would have to wait too long for him to be in an economic position to marry, by which time he might regard her as too old. This was a sincere quandary for her because her parents were the same age and she regarded them as an ideal model of a harmonious ‘love marriage’. In addition, on her mother’s side, her grandparents who lived in an adjacent Arabic house quintessentialised an ideal familial model for her. She was pleased and entertained by the level of love for each other they still had despite their advanced years.

Muhannad

By the age of 27, Muhannad had already completed his degree in Economics, Business and Trade, worked in Dubai for a time and returned to Damascus upon the deterioration of his father’s health and subsequent death in order to help his older siblings take care of their mother. His experience in the Emirates had allowed him to

secure a reasonable position in an import/export business. On his return from Dubai he had invested his savings, with help from his paternal uncle and some of his share of his father's estate, in a new apartment. Despite owning his own home, Muhannad preferred to live at his parent's house, keeping his mother and sister company.

In his late teens and early twenties, Muhannad had been incurably shy, often teased by his male friends during his military service and at the university for his bashfulness. However, after working hard in the Emirates and experiencing alternative types of living, Muhannad had gained enough confidence to have had a relationship with a young Christian colleague. At the time, he had felt passionate about their relationship, often phoning her over ten times a day on the flashy new mobile that was one of many elaborate presents he had bought her. Muhannad's own family were reticent yet supportive since his Christian girlfriend came from a good family and Muhannad's own paternal grandmother had been Christian. Nonetheless, the romance slowly deteriorated due, according to Muhannad, to pressure from her family who were not keen on their daughter marrying a Muslim.

Subsequently, Muhannad felt more ambivalent about 'romantic-love' marriages and decided to ask his mother to look for possible brides. After visiting various young women and their families, his mother had presented him with a number of options but he felt that none of them had a good enough comportment or 'were pretty or had a mind of their own'. Via his sister, he had negotiated and clarified his criteria which did not exactly match his mother's. He had seen Izrah at the university and been immediately smitten by her demeanour and, on an impulse, had followed her. Discovering the area she lived in, he visited a friend nearby to ascertain her family's name and back ground. 'Because Izrah's grandfather was a *sheikh*, she was even more appealing'. He told his mother, who contacted her younger sister, the secretary at the university office. Later, in a joint interview, he told his wife Izrah, 'The coincidence was better than a thousand appointments'. Approaching Izrah's family home in Muhannad's uncle's car, the family had joked nervously about what they would look for in Izrah and her family - beauty and religiosity - and what embarrassing information they might let slip to Izrah's family about Muhannad. Half-joking, half-serious, Muhannad's sister decreed that his mother should play the disapproving one and his aunt the welcoming one.

Izrah's Mother & Father

Izrah's father, a civil engineer from Homs and her mother met in Damascus through friends in the 1980s. After completing their studies, they had married and both had worked for a few years before having children. When Izrah's mother was approached by Muhannad's, both she and her husband had already been expecting that their daughter would soon receive requests for her hand in marriage. Izrah's father left the arrangements with his wife but discreetly asked a friend who owned a corner shop on Muhannad's family's block to make enquiries about this prospective groom and his family. The sorts of information he wished to glean spanned from 'criminal convictions, to solvency, to the particulars of religious involvement', and importantly to Izrah's father, the family's 'attitude towards education and work'. Izrah's father was hesitant about young people in general having their marriages organised for them by their family members, believing that a 'love match' was a more stable arrangement. Izrah's mother concurred that a love marriage was ideal but pragmatically felt she had seen so many 'love matches' fall apart among her friends and relations that she was inclined to think her own marriage represented a 'lucky exception'.

Muhannad's Mother

When Muhannad's mother was 14, she had become engaged to her paternal first cousin thirteen years her senior. She had known him as a cousin since birth and was comfortable in his company. When Muhannad, her youngest child, came to her to request she find a bride she had mixed feelings. On the one hand, 'I did not want to lose my son's company but again I felt proud that he had asked me and I want to make sure that all of my sons are happily married with children'. Muhannad's mother had already been instrumental in arranging marriages for her four older children and regarded herself as something of a specialist on the matter. Indeed, she had already found several suitable brides for Muhannad, two through her 'coffee friends' and one girl she had spoken directly to whilst shopping with her granddaughters. After her attempts had been rejected, Muhannad's mother had begun to wonder whether to leave the job to her daughter, but it was at this point Muhannad

instructed her to arrange a meeting with Izrah's family. Muhannad's mother was sceptical but convinced by the enthusiasm of her sister who relished the intrigues of romance and relationships. She contacted her late husband's older brother and her own eldest son to inform them of her decision and to elicit their help in finding out about the family circumstances of this prospective bride.

After visiting Izrah and her family, Muhannad's mother's concerns were not initially allayed. 'I could see why Muhannad liked Izrah, she had a neat demeanour and a pretty face'. However, Izrah's family were clearly from a lower background than theirs and in her experience, this only ever resulted in trouble. In particular, she had been aggrieved by the lack of priority given by Izrah's family to hospitality, with only one small reception room and a separate marital bedroom prioritised in the small space available. Despite her misgivings and warnings, Muhannad became resolute and after some pressure, convinced his mother to explore the possibilities. It was arranged with her brother-in-law, sister and daughter that Muhannad and Izrah could meet one more time, less formally, accompanied by Muhannad's sister only. When after three meetings Muhannad announced that he thought Izrah would agree to a marriage proposal and that this was what he wanted, Muhannad's mother contacted Izrah's to propose formally. Two days later, Izrah's mother contacted Muhannad's provisionally accepting the proposal and naming the *mahr* and conditions Izrah's family required. At 130,000 SYP immediate *mahr* and 500,000 SYP deferred, the *mahr* suggested was considerably higher than Muhannad's mother had anticipated, given Izrah's background and her son's guarantee of a house.

Aamal & Mawiyah

The codified and common interlacing of personal desire and family intervention expressed in the early stages of Izrah and Muhannad's courtship can be compared to the machinations of Mawiyah to influence the marriage choices of Aamal. In the previous chapter, one of several triggers for Mawiyah's burning of the photographs at that particular time was her anger and frustration with her only daughter. In particular, Mawiyah was enraged by Aamal's inappropriate romantic attachment to Adnan, the son of Mawiyah's best friend from school. Aamal and Adnan had been engaged four years previously when Aamal was 15. This was, however, only an

informal arrangement with no engagement party held and no solid negotiations having been undertaken, save an understanding that Aamal and Adnan would not be married until after Aamal turned 18. Mawiyah, by her own account, had become uneasy with the arrangement and this unease was galvanised as opposition, leading her to break off the initial arrangement, when she observed Adnan behaving cruelly towards his smaller sister (the inference she made was that he had been violent though Mawiyah refused to spell out what she had witnessed). As she stated:

That boy is not from a good family, I love my friend, but her son is really a troublemaker (mashkleijī (colloq.)) just like his father. You can tell how a man will treat his wife by how he treats his sister and mother; if he hits his sister and is always asking for money from his mother, he is no good.

This comment reflects the way in which the character of the possible groom (or bride) can be refracted through the prism of their family relations and actions towards them. Explicit in Mawiyah's criticisms are the forms of judgement so integral to the classic regional literature on 'honour and shame'. Early Middle Eastern and Pan-Mediterranean anthropological modelling of kinship around spatio-structuring of gender and sentiments of honour and its corollary shame filled in the lived details of Middle Eastern kinship which segmentary lineage theorising often neglected, and in so doing asked questions about the obligations and presumptions guiding the structuring of marriage practices (Abu-Zeid 1965; Abu-Zahra 1970; Abu Lughod 1986). What both Mawiyah and work on honour and shame remind us of is that it is very hard to essentialise patterns of marriage without fully grasping the sorts of specific kin-relationships that are prerequisite and activated at the point of marriage. These vary enormously within the region, and between socio-economic statuses and religio-cultural outlooks of specific kin groups. Mawiyah believed she had a pretty good idea of what kind of husband Adnan would be because she knew the family and the context. Moreover, an implicit logic of 'pedigree' and inheritance is present not only in this quote but in similar comments made by others about how to ascertain suitability and judge the character of possible matches. For my

informants, congruence of good family and its evidence in good potential brides and grooms was continuously being sought through a layering of knowledge. For this reason families paid great attention to the gleaning of information about prospective partners for their kin, as evidenced by the enquiries of both Izrah's father and Muhannad's uncle and brother. A corollary of this is the effort to follow patterns of isogamy and endogamy, especially first cousin marriage. That Adnan's father was 'problematic', regardless of his mother's interventions, added to Mawiyah's understanding of Adnan's character.

By breaking up the original tacit engagement between Aamal and Adnan, Mawiyah had also sacrificed her own close friendship with Adnan's mother. When I first came to live with Mawiyah and Aamal, there had been little contact with their erstwhile close friend and fiancé respectively in the previous few years, although they occasionally mentioned them with a mixture of fondness and reproach. This is indicative of a prevailing logic that distinguishes explicitly between those who are appropriate or possible friends, and those who are potential family. Gilsenan (1996) discusses accounts of friends in relation to kin or potential kin and stresses that in a village environment where everyone of a similar socio-economic background is potentially related, friends are only possible outside the village. In the urban context of Damascus, the distinction between friends and potential kin was never absolute but it did reflect the qualitative dimension of practices of isogamy and endogamy which stressed that sameness was a quality to be cultivated between kin in a manner unnecessary between friends and acquaintances. The distinction was often made very explicit to me when people talked about how much they loved their friends but did not think they were morally good people and so would have trouble marrying in the future, thus highlighting the primacy of existing family, as opposed to friends, as sources of moral example in the production of new family.

Tentative beginnings & the place of mothers

Neither Muhannad's mother's circumspection towards Izrah nor Mawiyah's stance against Adnan were unusual among families of children choosing their own partners. Mothers of sons often considered themselves the 'brokers' of marriages, finding

partners, negotiating terms and organizing the process. This role could be quite active, from enquiring among acquaintances to intentionally frequenting public spaces that younger women of the right demeanour and social background might socialise in. For example, some mothers would go out of their way to pray and relax in certain mosques in the vicinity of the university, seeking potential partners of requisite education and piety. Others were keen to shop in particular districts so they might observe young women of the equivalent socio-economic status making aesthetic choices which might also speak to refinement and modesty. Sometimes, mothers accosted young women with pinches and intimidating questions, but for the most part turned on the charm, complimenting them on their shopping choices. However, important to remember in this allocation of labour is that relations between mother and son are not automatically ones of equality. Mothers, if not sons, seemed to see themselves as the gateways to their sons' *desires*, who then 'owed' them for the labour they had put into making those things happen, which might include extra money-earning ventures to pay for the wedding as well as finding and arranging matches. Here, a disjuncture is evident between the expectations of parents and children, that is framed in other ethnographic accounts in terms of self-interest and experience. As Rugh's informants point out, parents know what is good for their children as theirs is a selfless interest rather than the irrationality of love (1997:131). Bringing in a male-focused dimension, Borneman says that most men 'in Syria generally think adult life begins with marriage, and they obsessively fantasise about these absent women' (2007:6). Later, he points out 'since the first marriage tends to be arranged, at least for men of the over-thirty generation, many dream of marrying a second wife whom they would be able to choose themselves, on the basis of qualities that they value or on the basis of romantic love' (2007:22). From this perspective, it appears that Syrian marriages can be more generally characterised as arranged in line with parental concerns and understanding of contingency. Certainly Muhannad's mother was concerned not only with securing a good match for her son's happiness, but also with ensuring that the prestige and well-being of her family and herself were not undermined by Muhannad's marrying someone who did not fulfil her ideals of socio-economic isogamy. However, extrapolating direct material concerns from the rhetorics of negotiation is not possible in this instance since Muhannad was her

youngest son and she had many older children on whom to rely for financial support. Instead, one influencing factor was the strong emotive bond between mother and son, the cross-subjectivity that makes the mother-son relationship stand out as so central to Damascene familial dynamics.

Offering a processual, life-cycle based account of family structure, Kandiyoti (1988, 1991) regards the mother-of-the-groom as a crucial figure in Middle Eastern kinship, whose agency is realised and made visible through marriage practices. Women's only truly legitimate path to power is through bearing children, especially male. This offers both prestige and also more concrete power in terms of the control and emotional connection between mother and child. Kandiyoti identifies tensions, not least those of the triumvirate mother/son/wife. The antipathy between mother and daughter-in-law is recorded in many ethnographic accounts (Moors 1995; White 2002) and was a potent rhetoric and latent reality among the Damascenes I worked with. It is not inevitable, however, and should not be taken for granted as many of my informants also spoke fondly of their mothers-in-law. It is often mitigated by cousin marriage and close natal ties (Abu-Lughod 1986; Rothenberg 2004) and is tempered by other dynamics of trust and control. In Kandiyoti's formulation, women 'bargain with patriarchy' by harnessing the structure that places them in a subjugated position as a new bride. As women move through their life-course, they eventually become the problematic mother-in-law themselves, wielding power over their own hapless daughter(s)-in-law (Kandiyoti 1991:30). Evidence from Inhorn (1996), who addresses childless couples in Egypt, suggests that women *and* men can utilise this very ability to bargain with patriarchal structures via the cross-subjectivity and 'patriarchal connectivity' that Joseph theorises (1994), allowing for the state of being married to be negotiated around the specifics of the couple's circumstances (Inhorn 1996:9, 156). This process conforms to generalised assertions that pervade the socio-historical literature on the region that Middle Eastern families are moving towards a model of conjugality (possibly but not automatically emulating Euro-American configurations) with an emphasis on the couple as the primary unit rather than the extended family (Hopkins 2003; Inhorn 2012). Consequently the relationship between mother and son can be seen as one of ongoing negotiation through such processes as getting married. It is striking that Muhannad was the primary instigator

and decision-maker in his choice of Izrah as a bride, a pattern I found common from accounts and practices of matchmaking. Yet grooms' mothers certainly do play a very important managerial role and this suggests that it is easy to overemphasise the status of the groom's mother without actually accounting for what her important role is in these exchanges.

There is another mother-child relationship evident in both Izrah and Aamal's cases. Mothers of daughters also play an important but often less visible role in contracting marriage unions. As is described in the case of Izrah, it is common for mothers of daughters to be the mediators between their husband and any potential groom's family. Hence they are often the principle facilitators of arrangements leading to marriage; however, their labour at this point is under-played or subsumed in wider kin assertions of the 'value' of their daughter. In Mawiyah's case, her visible instrumentality was a response to the lack of care offered by Aamal's patri-kin. This also points to an important disjuncture between the practice and rhetoric of providing for sons' futures over daughters'. Mothers persistently voiced the importance they placed on sons as sources of possible future security, financial and emotional, emphasising their connection and the effort in which they engaged on their sons' behalf. However, as practice and activity, they were at least as likely to be making plans and engaged in work towards daughters' futures. Conversely, fathers often emphasised the moral status they gained from making preparations for their daughters in marriage and beyond. A common refrain from senior men was 'blessed are the fathers of daughters', alluding to the moral selfhood that a man gained from his beneficence towards junior female kin and the reciprocal care daughters often took over their aging parents. However, in practice senior men often delegated financial responsibility for daughters, especially once they had been married and even after occasions of daughters' widowhood or divorce, to their wives.

Making a relationship, co-opting the family resources & negotiating the terms

Izrah & Muhannad

When Muhannad and Izrah met for the second time, chaperoned by Muhannad's sister, Muhannad's sister extracted Izrah's mobile number and requested permission for Muhannad to call her. After meeting without their families' knowledge a couple of times, Izrah and Muhannad were seen by an acquaintance of Izrah's, which precipitated a mutual agreement to an engagement between them.

Izrah's parents

Izrah's father had misgivings about the match and felt that if Muhannad was serious, he needed to agree to the terms of a *mahr* and contract. Despite it being quite common practice, Izrah's father felt that 18 was too young to marry and given his daughter's academic leaning, was concerned that she should finish her degree. He worried that Izrah lacked a wide supporting family network in Damascus, especially since her only brother was still a small child. He needed to be certain of his daughter's safety in the event of his death.

Initially, Izrah's father stipulated an immediate *mahr* of 170,000 SYP, a value so high that Izrah's mother was certain he was completely rejecting the marriage offer. She implored her husband to relent and lower the *mahr*, on Izrah's behalf. Izrah herself was so alarmed by her father's obstinacy that she appealed to her maternal grandfather, the *sheikh*, for help. He intervened on her behalf, suggesting that the common desire that Izrah finish her degree be spelled out very clearly in the contract (*katb al-kitāb*) as a set of conditions (*sharūṭ*). Izrah also countered her father's belief that her education made her value higher, arguing 'If education is so important then surely no *mahr* should be asked at all except a token'.

Muhannad

When the relatively high *mahr* was stipulated, Muhannad was unperturbed. He went straight to his paternal uncle and requested that he loan him the money for the *mahr*, and then Muhannad himself would cover the whole costs of the wedding celebration.

As he expected, after a cursory wait of three days his uncle contacted him to confirm that he would put up the money for the *mahr* that could then be slowly repaid at a later date. Muhannad then had to convince his mother that the high *mahr* cost was indicative of the care Izrah's family took for their daughter's well-being and not because they were 'money-grabbing opportunists'. Eventually she relented, stating that if they wanted such a high *mahr* then they would have to play by true Damascene 'rules' with respect to sex-segregated marriage ceremonies and a period of residence with the groom's family following marriage. This was of limited interest to Muhannad as these details would be arranged between his mother, fiancée and mother-in-law-to-be. Instead, Muhannad asked his mother to help him select a ring that he wished to present personally to Izrah, which would later be augmented with an engraving when the couple married.

Limiting factors on conjugality

Aamal & Adnan

Short of money and desperately seeking ways to return to Dubai where she had worked for a year, Aamal began to pull in any favour she might have access to. In the course of this and despite some misgivings, she got back in touch with Adnan, of whom she spoke fondly as someone who 'loves me really'. Aamal explained to me that she had avoided contact for a long time prior to this because of her mother's disapproval. She was delighted to find that he had recently bought a car, offering her the possibility of experiencing freedoms she had not enjoyed since being in Dubai. Over the following month Aamal saw increasing amounts of Adnan, whom I met briefly on several occasions. He gave Aamal lifts to a small job she had as a helper at expensive children's parties in the villas in the wealthy area of Yarfour and which allowed her to earn money to eventually travel. Of all the things she did that met disapproval from her mother - wearing makeup and going unveiled, staying out late, eating out of the home - contacting Adnan was certainly the one about which Aamal expressed the most guilt and trepidation. She told me repeatedly that a skin rash she had developed was a sign of how the worry her mother would find out was making her sick. After two weeks in which I hardly saw Aamal despite technically living in

the same house, she told me what had been going on with Adnan over a coffee. Leaning back and exhaling *Gaulois* smoke whilst perusing the menu, she said with studied nonchalance;

... So today I had a call from the mother of Adnan, saying 'I want to talk to you and your mother about a groom ('arīs), I have a groom for you,' and I was very surprised and worried... you know what she said? I have, I want bride ('arūs) for my son!

Bethany: You mean Adnan?

Aamal: Yes, you know Adnan... but I don't want my mother to know because my mama and her fight... they were friends, REALLY, but they have fought for a long time now. My mum does not want to know about Adnan.

Bethany: So what is really going on between you and Adnan? What would you actually like to happen?

Aamal: (shrugging and rolling her eyes) I want him as a husband but you know I have my plans... I don't just want to be a wife, I want to manage window design, carry on with what I was doing in Dubai.

Bethany: What about your plans, would they carry on? What about Youssef (the boyfriend she had left in Dubai and had hitherto been committed to, often citing as an important incentive for her return to the UAE)? How do you feel about Adnan?

Aamal: (Ignoring my first two questions) Well you know we were engaged before... I have known him all my life and so he is, you know ghālī (colloq.), to me I always feel this way towards him in my heart.

Bethany: You said this before, I wanted to ask what exactly do you mean when you say ghālī?

Aamal: Well you know how you feel about something when it is expensive?

Bethany: You mean when it has a high price?

Aamal: No! Like a new dress or a box of pearls.

Bethany: You mean (in English) 'precious like a treasure is precious'?

Aamal: Yeah he is a 'treasure' on my heart... well he always has been.

Aamal ruminated for a second until her phone rang... it was Adnan in distress and unusually brusque on the phone, omitting any pleasantries.

Adnan: Where are you?/ What are you doing?/ I am coming right there, yella bye.

Aamal: In Sha'lan with Bethany/ we are having a coffee... what's up?

Aamal seemed pleased that Adnan was on his way, asking if her hair and make-up looked all right.

Bethany: Do you love Adnan like you love Youssef? Do you think you will be happy with him?

Aamal: I don't mind marrying, but my mum isn't going to let me marry Adnan. I keep on telling him, 'Hey baby, slow down!... you see [leaning forward conspiratorially across the table] the family of Adnan they were RICH, I mean really rich. But Adnan's grandfather controls all the money. So you know, this means they didn't build on their assets and his father is always stressed. Because of this the grandfather, the father and the mother (of Adnan) are always fighting.

Bethany: Why are they always fighting exactly?

Aamal: They all live, all the family in one building, this is a real shame, it means they have no freedom (hurriyya). You know what I'm saying?

Bethany: What you mean they all have to do as the grandfather says?

Aamal: Oh ye-e-s, all Adnan's family, all his uncles and more. But wait, it's not just one house, it's like in Mezzeh they have apartments together.

Bethany: You mean they all live in the same apartment block?

Aamal: Right, but it's not exactly the house, lots of people live something like this, y'know its usual ('ādi (colloq.)) here in Syria, it's more the money when you really consider it. So all the people in the family must go to the grandfather if they want anything, just some clothes, some extra money for special food, if they need anything. Like Adnan has been wanting this new car for a very long time, 'You know how he luuuurves cars', they are his life. But his father won't give him the money, he won't even though the family is very rich.

Bethany: Do you think this is because his grandfather won't give Adnan's father the money in the first place or is it more complicated? Who really has control?

Aamal: I don't know. I just know that this shows they are not good people... they have plenty of money, they could have easily saved to give money to Adnan so he can marry but they just don't.

Bethany: But they helped him with the car, they gave him some money eventually. So they do give some money?

Aamal: Yes some... but just not enough.

At that point Adnan strode in, fraught, explaining how his mother's interventions had caused ructions with Mawiyah who stood solidly against any union between Aamal and Adnan. The couple went over the same set of options repetitively, a tearful Adnan cajoling Aamal to force the marriage and go against her mother; Aamal trying to calm Adnan down and make him see that they had to wait. Adnan explained the situation not in financial terms as Aamal did but rather emotional sentiment. 'My parent's relationship has been full of fighting and problems, now my father is divorcing my mother and marrying another wife. I want a marriage that will stay together'. He illustrated this on a piece of paper for me: two unsteady lines running

parallel with each other that met at the point of marriage and then separated for the duration, again moving in parallel as though marriage was purely a painful collision. ‘What I want, what I would like is this’: two lines running parallel that joined and then looped in and out of each other.

Eventually, Adnan was forced to capitulate since neither of them had money or a home to go to if they did marry. This emphasis on material and financial resources permeated all conversations, interviews and arrangements around marriage during my fieldwork. For those like Adnan and Aamal, becoming a married couple without the support of a benefactor was a difficult hurdle to surmount given that few state benefits would be open to them and they had no possible way of borrowing money from a bank. Importantly, until 2003, very small (one- or two-room) apartments were given to newlyweds by the state, in distant (often arid and litter-strewn) suburbs of Damascus although this was largely eschewed by all but poor migrants from the countryside. However, with increased economic liberalisation under Bashar Asad’s presidency, these state benefits had been slowly phased out. Although liberalisation of the banks had also allowed greater penetration of foreign investment, during my research period the possibility of normal poorer Syrians without pre-existing substantial capital availing themselves of mortgages and loans was limited⁷. As illustrated by Aamal and Adnan’s example, the possibility of marriage was reliant on other family members not only for permission but also for funds. In this instance, financial help with housing was required as neither party would countenance living with Adnan’s family for the very reason Adnan did not have access to resources; the controlling behaviour of his grandfather. Thus one route to their union was heavily barred for the moment, influenced but not only determined by Mawiyah’s opinion and permission.

The frustrated process of negotiation for Aamal and Adnan compares to the common, calculable wait of three days taken by Muhannad’s uncle to confirm his support and funds. Such types of systematised waiting indicate a type of generational control over resources which must be mediated with care and deliberation

⁷ Most men from less wealthy backgrounds are involved to a lesser or greater degree in savings groups. However these tended to focus their payouts on smaller things such as domestic white goods, small business loans and help with bribes to get members (and sometimes their relatives) out of military service or prison.

commensurate with their importance. Often the less wealthy had even more systematised ways of negotiating what resources they did have. Among families from poorer backgrounds than Muhannad and Adnan's, ambitions for independent home ownership were commonly stated among young prospective brides and grooms whom I encountered. Since these ambitions were not immediately realisable, they were steered instead towards having a separate space, either in a family residence or rented, with the promise of systematised ongoing help for the future. Hence, poverty was not an absolute barrier to marriage, rather 'waithood' is revealed as an aspirational concern and its articulation through economic absolutes as a metaphorical filter to do with class consolidation and other, more personal concerns.

A bride's engagement party

Izrah

Prior to her engagement party, Izrah began to feel nervous; this was her family's chance to reveal the extent of their generosity and hospitality, and her own personal opportunity to show off her taste. She had selected a caramel dress of satin, with a net overlay and a flower motif picked out in intricately sewn beads and sequins of pearlescent browns and gold. These colours she hoped would remove emphasis from her warm skin tone that was perceived as unfashionable. Her long dark hair had been streaked subtly with matching caramel highlights to lighten its shade. Her mother had organised the guests, tactfully liaising with Muhannad's mother over copious cups of strong sweet coffee. Izrah had been given the choice by her father as to whether she should sign the contract before her engagement party or before her wedding party that would not be for at least another year. Her mother had warned her of the problems that she might encounter if, having signed the contract, she then found she could not complete the marriage with Muhannad. Eventually, after pressure from Muhannad's family and assurances that the conditions she set would be stipulated in the contract, she had decided to sign it the day before the engagement party. Because there had been some disagreement over the amount of the *mahr* and the conditions stipulated in it, the signing took place at Muhannad's uncle's home and wider family on both sides were invited for coffee and to bear witness *en masse*.

On the day of the engagement party itself, the house was teeming with activity. Izrah's mother and aunts cleaned the whole house and organised chairs, music, decorations and provisions. As they worked, the women became raucous, joking and remembering their own engagements and periods of courtship, speculating as to whether the quiet and studious Izrah might become emboldened in her affianced state. They jested about how many dances they would manage and lightly bickered over what kind of music should be selected: old or new; religious or romantic; urban or rural.

Izrah's Grandparents

Since Izrah had no brothers old enough to take responsibility, her grandfather had elected himself as organiser of Izrah's male cousins and younger brothers for the duration of the engagement and marriage process. He had selected Izrah's younger sister to buy gifts of jewellery to be given on behalf of her young brothers, since they were not old enough to be trusted to choose correctly, and on the eve of the engagement party he instructed the cousins and brothers on the roles they needed to play the following day. Such meticulous concerns appeared to be informed by his own biography.

Izrah's grandparents had known each other since childhood as they were second cousins. She had been expected to marry her first cousin who was considerably older than herself (at least 20 years). Instead, he had been killed during the Second World War. She was then expected to marry an even older uncle whom she had never met. However, over this period, Izrah's grandparents' childhood friendship had blossomed into romantic affection. This affection had been rejected by her own eldest brother, requiring the couple to perform a kind of elopement. Izrah's grandmother had sought refuge in her maternal uncle's house among the orchards and market gardens that surrounded Damascus (*ghūta*), while the brother and Izrah's grandfather negotiated a satisfactory conclusion whereby the uncle renounced his claim and Izrah's grandfather paid a substantial *mahr* to his brother-in-law, rather than bride, including a section of land he had inherited. Because of the tensions involved, Izrah's grandmother had forgone many of the normal gifts and celebrations of a bride. No legal documents had been signed; instead of a contractual

(*katb al-kitāb*) registration, a spoken agreement was made. At the time, Izrah's grandfather had greater concerns supporting his new family in the rapidly changing newly independent nation-state of Syria. However, with his own daughters and especially now with his granddaughter, he was vigilant to ensure they did not lose out in the same way. Importantly, in the face of his own mortality, he was equally concerned for the balance of his soul and the welfare of his granddaughter in exacting a good match. In his case, endogamous marriage (second cousins) had broken rather than reinforced bonds because the correct processual steps had not been taken and they had eloped.

Marriage as a contingent process

Mawiyah

On my return to Mawiyah's house after speaking to Aamal and Adnan, Adnan's mother was there and the atmosphere was both strained and excited. She had come not only to repeat her request for Mawiyah's permission for their children to marry, she could also sweeten the proposal with news of her own. Adnan's father had divorced her and this merely needed ratifying by a lawyer. Only the day before, however, she had received an offer of marriage from a wealthy Syrian who lived primarily in the Emirates. She would be his second wife, something that did not appear to perturb her. As part of her own negotiations with this suitor, she had managed to arrange for him to provide her with a separate home, 'as is stipulated in Islam' she said solemnly, before bursting into giggles and adding in a fluting crescendo 'as well as my own car!'. To this, Mawiyah shrieked, past animosity was submerged by excitement and the two friends from childhood discussed in depth all of the places they would go, all of the things they could do with this car. Finally, Adnan's mother reached the crux of her visit: a deal with Mawiyah. If Mawiyah agreed to Adnan marrying Aamal, then her friend would be willing to share her good fortune with the struggling Mawiyah. They could live together in this new apartment as one family, and on the occasions that her new husband was in Damascus, she would give Mawiyah free access to the car so she could go and stay with her relatives. Mawiyah's cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkled at the possibility of

living in a clean, newer apartment, driving around Damascus and its environs in a car unhindered. Both Mawiyah and her friend were hoping they could choose the car, Mawiyah optimistic that her long-held dream to drive a mini (any colour except black) might finally come true, whilst her friend hoped for something larger, newer and German. As Mawiyah later told me with pragmatism, any car would allow her to earn more money and take her youngest child Mustafa and her granddaughter on trips. She told Adnan's mother she would think about it. Making an excuse that she would like to see Aamal with more qualifications before she married, Mawiyah promised to get back in touch with Adnan's mother after discussing the situation more with Aamal.

Over the following week, it transpired that this offer of accommodation and use of this fabled car would be the substitute for Aamal's *mahr*, the allotted piece of money or property a bride should receive from the groom, since Adnan's father and grandfather were unwilling to contribute any money. The plan had the advantage of allowing Mawiyah to watch over Aamal and Adnan in the initial stages of marriage as they would have nowhere to go but Adnan's mother's new home. However, as the initial glow of excitement died down, Mawiyah became increasingly reticent, suspecting that even if this deal did work she would replace one type of subservience for another. In Mawiyah's words, her choices were limited: '*Heik 'aw heik (colloq.)*. This or that? What's the difference? Nothing will change the past!' Eventually she sought the advice of her *sheikh* at the Abu Nour mosque. According to Mawiyah, the *sheikh* observed that 'such an arrangement would not be a problem but you should be wary of allowing your daughter to marry someone whom you do not judge as worthy of her'. Mawiyah began to have grave doubts, becoming sceptical that her friend would keep her word, wondering if the supposed rich suitor might be in some part fabricated, arguing with Aamal every time she suspected her of seeing Adnan and increasingly restating her misgivings about his character and conduct. It seemed that Mawiyah had decided the proposed arrangement was doubly problematic since it would give neither her daughter nor herself the opportunity for a stable and prosperous future. Excitement about the future and its opportunity soured to misgivings that these options would leave her without support in later life. At this

point, she rowed with her daughter and in her wake, sobbed, 'I just don't want her to end up like me'.

In the event Aamal rejected Adnan, stating;

I thought we were going to get married but then he kept on borrowing money from me. Then the other day he said to me, 'You know you will have to help me pay for everything. You will have to keep working'... I mean he was saying I would have to work even without a mahr! I became suspicious then, his family has money so what does he want me to work for? Does he want my money? Does he want me to work so he can be free from his family?... If I work I want to give my money to my mama so that she doesn't have to work anymore, not to him just because his grandfather and father are so tight-arsed and senseless! It made me think, is it because he knows my father is sick? I feel now in my heart that he imagines I will inherit some of my father's estate when he dies and that is all Adnan really cares about. Y'know my father has money; he has my mother's money as well. If he died I would get some. Ummī was right. Adnan is not from a good family!

The possible marriage between Aamal and Adnan had, by the time I completed my fieldwork, been quashed for the second time. Strikingly, Aamal's rejection operated on a very similar logic to Mawiyah's doubts regarding his inherited physical and material practices which suggested he was not a good prospect. However, Aamal required her own evidence to reach the same conclusion.

I was present only for a small interlude of a convoluted process that may not yet have reached its conclusion, but it illustrated the ways in which understanding what is to 'come' and to be 'expected' from a good family can rely on quite heavy layering of relationships between family members at different stages of their lives. In this example, a proposal for marriage was buttressed by another within the same family. If Adnan's patrikin, especially his grandfather and father, were unwilling to

provide the resources for this marriage, Adnan's mother was potentially in a position to circumnavigate this obstacle with her own marriage to a wealthy man and the conditions she would set for this. Although this is, I believe, a unusual position for Syrians to be in, certainly not recognisable by most as a representation of what marriage is or should be in contemporary Damascus, as an outlier it nonetheless highlights why and how more conventional proposals and marriages like Izrah and Muhannad's are reliant on a wider net of relatives than just the couple and their immediate families. Moreover, despite the unusual nature of Adnan's mother's proposal 'package', the logic employed in the negotiations and their eventual failure is representative of the level of complexity and 'work' by a plethora of family members required to ensure a wedding eventually takes place. Indeed, from the data I collected, the relatively small number of participants in this example, primarily focusing just on the couple, their mothers and then their mother's past and prospective spouses, is as unusual as Aamal's determination to support her mother financially and the unorthodox offering of the use of a car instead of a *mahr*.

Far more common was the intervention of those like Izrah's grandparents, who also utilised their own marital experiences to help guide the couple through the process. Importantly, while Izrah's father was concerned that he would not always be around to look after Izrah, and Mawiyah tried to contend with how marriage might also impact on her future security, Izrah's grandparents' intervention was framed more in terms of the balance of their lifelong choices as they moved closer to death. Although Izrah was important to them, she was one of many grandchildren and commensurate with this fecundity they were more interested their family's diffuse moral future and (re)productive potential than the exact practicalities of material exchanges and outcomes. Put simply, their maternal and generational position gave them a distinct perspective and role of intervention in the marriage of Izrah and Muhannad which functioned to link the beginnings to the ends of life in the reproduction of kinship.

The wedding: a 'mother-in-law' takes the director's chair

Muhannad's Mother

Following the engagement party, Muhannad's mother had adjusted some of her arrangements for the wedding celebration. She met with Izrah several times, in particular with the dressmaker who was carefully constructing a lacy, beaded confection which left little to the imagination. The wedding was going to take place nearly a year after the engagement, but Muhannad's mother wanted everything to be well-organised.

When the wedding finally came around, Muhannad's mother had managed to purchase three dresses for the day in rich colours and beading. When the day began she rose at 5am and went to the hairdresser's, sending her niece to collect her three dresses from the dressmaker. She had her make-up prepared and then went to check on Izrah who had stayed with Muhannad's aunt. The women had stayed together all night, and at Muhannad's aunt's behest, a woman had been employed to henna the bride and other younger female family members the night before. When Muhannad's mother arrived, Izrah was still in the shower making the final adjustments to her body. Over the previous week, she had been exfoliated and depilated all over a couple of times to ensure she was as soft as possible. Now she had to prove to her mother-in-law-to-be and her own visiting aunt that she was of a satisfactory standard.

Later, when Izrah alighted from the bridal procession at the wedding venue, it was Muhannad's mother along with her daughters and sisters who initiated the call:

*Oh yes, our beautiful bride,
Oh yes, Muhannad is at her feet,
Oh yes, for you we will sing!
Walk proud our lovely pretty bride,
Walk proud my lovely bride,
The most beautiful bride in the garden...*

Muhannad's Uncle

At the men's celebration, Muhannad's uncle stood outside the shining new mosque supervising the proceedings, making sure that the sword-dancers had arrived before Muhannad came out and was escorted to the wedding venue. Eventually Muhannad's brother informed him that the religious speeches (*kuṭbei (colloq.)*) were over and the men were making their way out of the mosque. He made a quick call to Muhannad's mother to tell her to prepare the female gathering. The best sword-dancers they could afford lined up to form an avenue and sang loudly to the beat of their drums as Muhannad left the mosque.

The male wedding party rushed down the Autostrad in slick cars to where the women were celebrating. On the concourse, the sword-dancers continued their entertainment and finally began their last chant that brought Muhannad's mother out to encourage their singing and triumphant sentiment. She then escorted Muhannad into the venue where at last he would see his bride.

Izrah & Muhannad

Izrah had not wanted to cut the tiered wedding cake with a scimitar but Muhannad had insisted that it would look better on the wedding video. Now, as she watched it with me, she asked if it was nice, 'It's sweet, right?' I replied that it was and asked what Muhannad had said to her after their kiss for the camera. Izrah smiled, demurring to tell me.

For the first year of their marriage, Izrah and Muhannad lived with Muhannad's mother despite owning an apartment of their own, because Muhannad had managed to rent out the apartment to a family from Saudi for enough money to cover over half Izrah's *mahr*. This wise management, Muhannad proudly explained, would allow him to contribute to his teenage nephew's own marriage in the next decade or so. For Izrah, the living arrangements were far more problematic than ensuring her *mahr*, partly because she found Muhannad's mother overbearing and also because it meant her need to study for her degree was to an extent sidelined in place of studying to be a wife and mother. Fortunately, though, Izrah managed to complete her studies successfully without having to retake any exams. When the couple discovered they were expecting their first child, Muhannad diplomatically

moved them to their apartment and finally Izrah and Muhannad could make use of the furniture and other trousseau material (*jahaaz a-arus*) provided by their families at the time of their marriage.

Layering generations: the processes that cut & sew affective bonds

The arc of courtship, wedding and marriage between Izrah and Muhannad shows how different and specific family members come into play and influence throughout the process. Izrah's mother, in this instance, was an important if discreet agent of courtship, the negotiator and go-between; however, her part became marginalised after the engagement party that I would characterise as the effective giving away of the bride by her mother. This is potently illustrated by the public tears mothers of brides shed at engagement parties, tears being otherwise normally reserved for sons in particular. Muhannad's mother was an instrumental character throughout; despite the tensions between her and Izrah, she did not dominate as the 'mother-in-law' until after the engagement had taken place. Salamandra characterises the mother of the groom in Damascus as the director of the whole process of marriage (2004:55). What this shows is that for non-elite families, although her managerial role is crucial throughout it is only when the theatre of the wedding ceremony takes place that she takes on her directorial role. Importantly in this case and for nearly all of the wedding processes I observed and discussed with informants, it was not the mother of the groom who had the ultimate say but rather the male kin of the groom who would help them with the financial costs. To reiterate, Muhannad told me he knew he need only wait three days for his request to his uncle to be replied and confirmed. The wait of three days was common, combining the pragmatism of assessment with that of ensuring sufficient resources. The wait acted as a mark of the generational kin relationship between patron and client, or benefactor and receiver, iterating that this was a 'gift' that might not be given or an investment that might not be made and therefore highlighting how important such a male relative was for setting a junior family member up for the future.

In this account of a relatively smooth and (almost) 'complete' marriage process, I would like to draw attention to the way in which the narratives and

processes of past weddings and marriages between layers of generation offered a framework for younger members. Izrah relied on examples of ‘love marriages’ between her parents and maternal grandparents to influence her attitude towards marriage and define her expectations. She used this experience to help her negotiate a marriage that also involved some pragmatic ‘managed’ elements. Importantly, Izrah was secure in the knowledge that she could make the decision because of the nature of her parents’ example and, in particular, the trust her father placed in her ability to decide for herself.

The concept of ‘arranged marriages’ is problematised in the account of Muhannad and Izrah’s nuptial process and this reflects wider trends in contemporary Syria. Muhannad did follow a formalised approach to betrothal by getting his mother, aunt and sister involved early on and allowing them to conduct the negotiations. However, he had not accepted any of the candidates his mother had previously selected for him and moreover, both he and Izrah made an effort to get to know each other without family intervention before *they* decided to become engaged. Tellingly, there is no standard phrase in colloquial Damascene Arabic that can be translated as an ‘arranged marriage’; rather, there are marriages and there are ‘love marriages’ suggesting that love is not a given within Damascene weddings; yet it is a common aspiration. All of the first-time marriages and prospective marriages I encountered were in some ways arranged by wider family networks though also ultimately reliant on the compliance of the possible bride and groom. The only counters to this were second-time marriages, where divorced or widowed individuals like Mawiyah’s friend took a greater part in enacting their own negotiations, though here still, introductions were often made pragmatically via family and friends for individuals’ mutual benefit.

Younger, unmarried Damascenes in their teens and twenties unanimously asserted that it was better to meet your prospective partner by yourself and develop a friendship before anything was taken further. In practice, however, this ideal was not always possible, with many limitations on whether, when and how unmarried men and women might meet to ‘get to know each other’ without controlled supervision. Moreover, although this ideal was regularly reiterated to me, many young women in particular would suffix it with doubts over how they could tell if someone were a

good person before becoming friends with them. This raised an obvious conundrum: young people who might have opportunities to meet outside of their families' gaze, such as university students, often did not. Moreover, as was explained to me by both sexes, young men who were 'good people' needed to act in a way that preserved the reputation of any young woman they were interested in. In effect, this required men showing women only limited interest and not approaching them. Unmarried women of many ages and socio-economic backgrounds expressed the same sentiment as was articulated so clearly (in English) by one wealthy, educated, beautiful pharmacist who, at 30, believed she would be on the shelf forever. 'You get approached by all the bad men and they are ridiculous, it makes you feel like there are no good men here in Syria and like there is no point marrying anyway... then you remember that the few good men that do exist are exactly the ones who will never approach you so you will never meet them... and if you approach them they will presume you are a bad person. What can you do?' With this second guessing and layering of moralities, the spectre of 'waithood' loomed large in my informants' concerns for the future.

Rather than remaining forever single, most of the younger Syrians I listened to and observed would adopt one of two strategies. Either they would meet initially and get to know things about each other (especially over the phone thus avoiding meeting in person) before putting into action the mechanisms that would allow their union to become sanctioned by their family, through negotiations between the two families as if they were only aware of each other's existence rather than already friends. Or conversely, even when families scouted for prospective partners for their unwed relatives, or as occasionally happens, tacit agreements existed between parents and guardians that various individuals should marry when they grew up (a type of betrothal I found most common with cousin marriage), then efforts would be made to adopt a simultaneous 'romantic process'. In all instances that were discussed with me, a period of 'getting to know each other' was integral to the process. Moreover, a broad attitude prevailed that compatibility 'in person' was as important as (although perhaps not more important than) compatibility 'on paper'. According to her mother, in the case of Izrah, her family members had speculated jokingly as to whether she would become more carefree and vivacious during the year separating her engagement party and wedding celebration. This period often marks the most

exciting period for a couple, especially if like Izrah and Muhannad they had signed the contract making them legally wed, because they are permitted and encouraged to spend time enjoying the freedom of marriage to be seen out in public together, to go to restaurants and shopping without an escort, while remaining free from the full responsibilities of marriage and looking after a family⁸. Their process of becoming married contained within it elements of ambiguity as they moved between states, and opportunities in which they could prove themselves as suitable partners and responsible adults through the choices they made and patience they exhibited.



Processes of courtship and marriage encourage and exhibit both dependency on kin and means of independent decision-making.

⁸ Despite being legally married, it is not generally sanctioned that a couple can live or sleep together, although they may be able to stay in the same house depending on the attitudes and relationship of their families. During my fieldwork, I never heard of couples being pregnant before the actual wedding ceremony other than in vague rumours. Contraception is widely available, not least from moving bus clinics that visit districts. Abortion is also common although attitudes towards it vary enormously and do not correspond with relative religious conservatism among the Muslim population.

By the time I was collecting narratives of the process of courtship and the marriage from Izrah, Muhannad and their family members, Izrah was pregnant, having completed her studies as stipulated in her contract's conditions. As this stage of marriage was beginning, she was happy exactly because it allowed her to re-enter her own natal family. Of course, she had maintained contact with her family via visiting and phone but now with her impending birth she would be able to return to her own mother for a time, to nurture her as she became accustomed to being a mother.

Conclusion

In Damascus, marriage is a contingent process which relies heavily though not exclusively on specific sets of kin relations being successfully activated. Most visible is the relationship of mother and son, where mothers of prospective grooms operate as the primary brokers. Even when relationships have developed outside their sphere of influence, mothers of sons are pivotal in mediating their legitimisation and in ensuring general approval of resulting marriages. This process requires work by mothers and potential brides as well as other auxiliary female kin, in ideal circumstances creating a certain union of work and respect in the fraught relationship between mother- and daughter-in-law. But this model of productive dependency can also be usefully extended beyond Kandiyoti's (1988, 1991) mother-son-wife triumvirate, to incorporate other sets of kin-based relationships which are also central to this process of marriage. If the wedding can be compared to a theatrical performance with the mother of the groom the eventual director, then these elements would correspond to the financiers, production team and stagehands. Of central importance to this process is the network of male kin on which a groom, even one with his own capital, must rely to help foot the immediate costs of a wedding, accommodation and the *mahr*. This transaction is often framed, however, as only one in a long line of patri-kin exchanges which are ideally oriented towards augmenting both a young man's and his male kins' financial and social security. This is both evidenced by and contingent upon the successful production of the next generation.

The financial and reproductive qualities of marriage highlight the problems of predicting the future, provoking responses that attempt to tame it in some respects.

For my Damascene informants, the emphasis was on exacting a successful marriage, which is the absolute pre-requisite of legitimate reproduction. Understanding what a ‘good’ match and ‘good’ marriage might be is highly dependent not only on present circumstances but also on the examples presented by previous generations. Izrah and Muhannad had two competing models, one of arranged, cousin-marriage and one of marriages based on ‘love’. Neither was mutually exclusive but the advice and the example set by these models influenced the manner of their courtship and the choices they and their families around them made. Each set of relations activated had a multi-generational element to it which contained elements of looking forward towards birth and death. Similarly, the temporal aspect of change was evidenced not only in a ritual way, through rites of passage and periods of liminality or ‘waithood’ (Singerman 2007). Temporality was also present through the labour contained in establishing and maintaining material criteria and proving oneself eligible through acts of others and nestled dependency. In this way, longer-term concerns, especially towards successful reproduction, were mediated by the efforts and work evidenced in the shorter-term processes of courtship and getting married.

As Arendt ([1958] 1998) suggests, Heidegger’s ‘being towards death’ can be refigured as ‘being towards birth’, offering the possibility of plurality and change through (re)production. The two types of intentionality combine if we isolate the moments and manners by which acts of ‘labour’ become ‘work’ in a generative, creative and lasting sense. Thus mortality and natality (and possibly several others, being towards inter-subjectivity?) are not mutually exclusive when considered from the standpoint of the interactions of multiple family generations. Classic anthropological work alerts us to the alignments between death and birth, the striking parallels between funerary and initiation rituals whose symbolism contains the reassertion of life in the face of death (Turner 1967; Bloch and Parry 1982). Such birth/death rituals/festivals may act as boundary markers by which duration is divided and consequently ‘*create time* by creating intervals in social life’ (Leach 1961:135). In my ethnographic material, this creation of time and the overlay

between death and birth are expressed not so much through specific rituals at the points of birth and death but instead become apparent at the point of marriage. As Bloch and Parry point out, 'Neither that which is regeneration nor the symbolic means by which regeneration occurs can therefore be taken as self-evident' (1982:9), and what the Damascene material offers is that marriage as a life-cycle ritual is suggestive of both potential birth and death as multiple generations of family members' life-cycles interlock. Therefore I assert that in the process of Damascene marriage practices, we can see that temporalities oriented towards birth and death are integral to the marriage and reproductive efforts, choices and hesitations that go into eventually creating new generations.

Chapter 3.

Time, Marriage & the *Mahr*

Mawiyah's parents had recently moved to *Kafr Butna*, a dusty suburb 15 minutes drive from Damascus, in order to be next to a hospital where Mawiyah's declining father could receive medical attention with ease and speed. As her father slept wheezily on the divan, Mawiyah and her mother, Suhar, flicked between different satellite religious channels, settling on a channel that was broadcasting a popular Egyptian cleric. His sermon was focused on the obligations of marriage, and extolling the beneficence of *Allah* ecstatically. I had half-watched many of his sermons as he was popular not only with Mawiyah and her family but with other religious families I visited, his homily in formal Arabic often providing a sonic backdrop to the daily activities of domestic life. On this day, Suhar turned to Mawiyah who had just placed a bowl of chopped fruit on the coffee table, and said pointedly, 'He looks like my father. He is very beautiful (*jamīl*) and kind (*laṭīf*). My father had blue eyes exactly like his', etching the shape of her own face, and thus the ghost of her father's, from the eyes down for emphasis. This cleric (*ḥanafī*) did have an engaging, striking face with blue eyes and a white curly beard, much as Mawiyah and her family members had described their maternal grandfather to me in previous reminiscences of his daily constitutionals up Mount Qassioun to survey Damascus. Suhar then added, 'There was no divorce in my family. No, this family was without divorce, it was very good, it was a very good family and because there was no divorce there was always harmony (*insijām*). No one asked for a house or a big *mahr*, everyone knew they would be looked after. My father would not allow it, he would not allow divorce'. Mawiyah nodded in agreement but stayed subdued at her mother's reminiscence: the implications regarding her own past as a multiple divorcée and her resultant predicament were embroidered on every word.

Suhar's comments about her father's attitude to marriage and how that impacted on the *mahr* in a context of other forms of transaction and heritability, appears to give the *mahr* a place in predicting and managing the contingencies of the future. Her pointed comments also suggest that memories and narratives about past

marital practices were employed as commentaries on the present and more recent past. In this chapter, I consider the relationship between the *mahr* and narratives around marriage practices that are deemed successful and those that stumble, are challenging, or in some instances go ‘wrong’. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the time and effort afforded to the creation of an appropriate union could be understood as ‘work’, in Arendt’s ([1958] 1998) formulation of an activity that leaves behind an enduring artefact and has a memorialising purpose beyond that of subsistence survival. In this chapter, I explore how the inter-generational ‘work’ of becoming married can also be channelled into attempts at pre-empting possible problems and exacting a solution and/or compromise to an undesirable marital situation. Based on informal interviews and some targeted archival research, this chapter examines the nature of narratives about the past as articulated by living Damascenes and by documentary accounts. I highlight how inter-generational dynamics, temporal dispositions and the media of their action are present in the scaling of temporality and cross-subjectivity in practices of the *mahr*, the bridal box and narratives around the *mahr* and marriage, which compare past with present.

The set of historically-specific marriage prestations which come under the rubric of the Islamic *mahr* represent a troublesome practice within anthropological theorising. As a prestation which comes from the groom and/or his family and is given to the bride and/or her family, the *mahr* can sometimes appear similar to bride-price/wealth and at other times closer to what Goody terms ‘indirect dowry’ (see Goody 1973:2; Moors 1995). Some comparative analysis presents the *mahr* as gift and others stress its importance as a financial commodity (Spiro 1975; Moors 1995). In the ethnographic literature it appears as an abstract set of principles of marital exchange, yet its changeability across location, time and social class makes it hard to formulate as part of an anthropological abstract model of marital and reproductive exchange. While there are many good accounts of how *mahr* practices are impacted upon by changing socio-economic and moral circumstances (Al-Khayyat 1990; Jean-Klein 2003), or the specific place the *mahr* holds in an historically-given context of familial exchange (Moors 1995), it is often hard to comprehend exactly what the *mahr* is doing in both specific contexts and more generally (Jean-Klein 2003). In this chapter, I argue that *mahr* practices and associated narratives that I encountered in

Damascus indicate ways in which families try to predict and ensure the future of their children and dependent agnates. Like Suhar's account, the *mahr* is often discussed as a crucial component in a wider web of marital and financial negotiations and transactions. Its formulations and negotiations are a decision-making process which can be traced as an effect of and affecting changing patterns of marital sociality. I suggest that rather than seeing it in absolute terms or as a succession of changing practices, the *mahr* choices and bequests of a previous generation create the framework of possibility for the following generation and so on. Indeed, I stress that it is exactly the *mahr*'s ambiguity, or more precisely the inherent tension it contains between gift and commodity transaction, which continuously allows it to emerge as an instrumental tool of decision-making and connection between past, present and future.

I begin this chapter by exploring the *mahr* and some of the ways it is understood by my informants and anthropologically. I then situate it within narratives around tensions of marriage and the intersection of narratives, specific and generic, about present, past and shifting practices. Finally, I compare the *mahr* to the bridal box in order to highlight their relative 'temporal connectivity' and their place in the social change they signify.

The changing *mahr*: confused terms & confusing practices

In its simplest legal definition the *mahr*, sometimes referred to as the dower¹ (Spiro 1975; Moors 1995) is a sum of money or property recorded in the Muslim marriage contract, in which other conditions such as the groom not taking any further wives may also be recorded. The recorded *mahr* is divided into two: an amount received directly at the point of marriage (*muqaddam* or *mu'ajjal*) which is often referred to

¹ The term dower is often used in the place of *mahr*. Moors (1995) makes it clear that she is using dower as a term to describe the variable practice of the *mahr* regardless of whether it is received by the bride or her father. However, Spiro (1975) uses the term dower to describe the contribution that the husband brings to the conjugal estate, paralleling dowry. The problem with this is that used in such a way the term dower includes property that belongs solely to the groom. Although it is true that the *mahr* can be absorbed into a conjugal fund as it may be used to pay for furniture or land, since the *mahr* is a gift to the bride (even when it goes to her father) and Muslim marriage is not legally made as a community of goods, this definition of dower obstructs the fundamental features of the *mahr* and therefore I will not use it when discussing my own data.

academically as the ‘immediate’ or ‘prompt’ dower (*mahr*) although translates more accurately in the Syrian context as the ‘advanced’ dower; and an amount that would be received by the wife before the husband’s estate was divided on his death or if he divorced her (*mu’akkar or mu’ajjal*), referred to as the ‘deferred’ dower (*mahr*).

The temporal and contingent quality of the *mahr* as a two-part transaction contributes to the complications of classifying it anthropologically as either bridewealth or ‘indirect’ dowry, not least since it is possible that the advanced *mahr* may be received by the bride’s kin yet the deferred *mahr* is received entirely by the bride. To limit this confusion while discussing the *mahr* in Damascus, I will use as a starting point a rather proscriptive and formal description of the *mahr* from a religious *doctora* at Abu Nour foundation who specialised in *Sharī’a* marriage codes.

Sharī’a orders that the woman be given all her mahr and that she sees the man before the contract is done. If she likes both, she should agree. Then the contract is to be done and the mahr must be given.

Religiously speaking, the father cannot control the mahr because it is the right of the woman.

If there is a distance from religion, ignorance leads people to get the woman married without her acceptance and without receiving her mahr which is wrong.

This would happen before in many families, but now it has been reduced because women know more about their religion and rights. So the woman receives her mahr to her own hands and deals with it however she likes.

In this ‘ideal’ formulation, the *mahr* is something given not between families or kin groups in exchange for a person or their labour, but very explicitly by the groom to the bride as her property alone. Consequently this definition of the *mahr* cannot be easily slotted into models of bridewealth and dowry (Schlegel and Eloul 1988). It is therefore hard to place neatly as a transaction that compensates a family for the right to remove a bride and/or augments the resources of either kin group (Goody 1973;

Spiro 1975). Rather, the transaction contains within it several possibilities, as suggested by the summary account of the *doctora*. In Damascus, the advanced *mahr* might not in practice be given to the bride but rather be pocketed by her father or family. Alternatively, the amount stipulated as the *mahr* is orchestrated to ensure specific suitors are encouraged or discouraged. In various contexts, a bride may choose not to request this ‘gift’ or to limit the amount requested for reasons of emotion, piety or political economy (see Moors 1995; Jean-Klein 2003). The *mahr* can also be instrumental in setting up a separate conjugal unit from either of the initial transacting kin groups, and this was the most common initial ‘use’ of the *mahr* resource I encountered in Damascus across family generations. Moreover, as the *doctora* alludes to in her summary of the changing nature of the *mahr*, the practice and understanding of what the *mahr* is, does and can do have not been consistent. They are variable over time and place. Therefore a theme which permeates my Damascene accounts of the *mahr* is an ever-increasing awareness among women of their rights concerning marital transactions and legislation, and how this has crafted new ways of approaching marriage transactions and obligations.

As with many practices in the Middle East and other Muslim areas, those that constitute and surround the *mahr* do not accurately fit into categories of ‘cultural’ versus ‘jural’ (Mundy 1988; Starr 1992). On the one hand, the legal aspects of the *mahr* as summarised do offer a set of parameters through which actors including the state, religious authorities, brides, grooms and their families filter their own understanding of their practices. On the other hand, the legal outlook is hardly more rigid and unchanging through time than the cultural practices and understandings, blurring the distinction between the two arenas. Moreover in the Syrian context, the logics and practices of the nominally Muslim *mahr* and prestations made at the point of marriage are not confined to the Muslim community, meaning that I encountered Christian families who would not dream of their members marrying without giving or receiving a *mahr*, despite there being no formal compulsion.

A consequence of the *mahr*’s fluidity is that past and competing formulations of the *mahr* shadow, stalk and eclipse one another. Indeed, when the Sharī’a *doctora* offered me her concise explanation of the *mahr*, she made a distinction between Syrian and wider Muslim practices stating that:

The price of gold, gifts, clothes and house furniture are all presents and not the mahr here in Syria, as they are in some Muslim countries.

If the marriage contract of a woman was signed 20 years ago and her mahr was 6,000 SYP then she must be given that very exact amount of money in the case of her being divorced or in the case the husband passed away.

Again if the mahr is in golden liras, which it is for some older women, then she must be given the same number of golden liras that were agreed upon when she was married.

Here the *doctora* made a pointed distinction between the *mahr* and other gifts the bride might receive at the point of marriage in Syria. She also added a personal note in conversation that she had heard that different interpretations had been made by other *Sharī'a* schools and in other Muslim countries, suggesting an acceptance of variability and possibility contained within the *mahr*. With regard to the amount a *mahr* should be, the *doctora* stressed that it was the token and intention that was important and not the amount, a sentiment that is contested in practice. Thus from the *Sunna* (accounts of the life of the Prophet) the *doctora* quoted:

'Manage it [the mahr], be it an iron ring'

[and]

'When Muhammad had his daughter Fatima married to Ali, he asked him for the mahr and he did not allow Ali to enter Fatima unless he pays the mahr'

This means that the mahr becomes the man's responsibility; he should pay whatever he can.

These sections of the *Sunna* were a standard response from religious clerics, *sheikhs* and specialists I questioned. However, the *doctora* added her own interpretation of what they meant and in this way, she was offering her own sense of what was at the core of the *mahr* – (male) conjugal responsibility. After she had narrated to me her

understanding of *Sharī'a* doctrine, our conversation turned to more personal issues. At the time, her eldest son was hoping to marry and so she was visiting prospective brides. She explained how for her, the *mahr* was an integral part of that process since a better prospective bride and her family would not ask for a large *mahr*. Ideally, they would ask for a token as their *mahr*, in particular a copy of the Qur'an, which fitted well into her understanding of the *mahr* as not about an amount of money but a characteristic of responsibility. 'Of course,' she insisted, they *would* prepare an adequate *mahr* for any bride, they were just unwilling to give it to someone who requested it. Her own husband had died a decade before, having had the forethought to register a comparatively large sum of money as her deferred *mahr*, which she had invested at the time in a small olive orchard. The value of this land had increased due to development and she had sold her share; she would use this capital as the basis for her son's *mahr*. In this way, a series of decisions around the *mahr* contained a causal connection which stretched back to her own marriage and forward to that of her son's and the possibilities this contained.

In his analysis of bridewealth and dowry, Goody (1973) considers the problem of the *mahr* and reaches a theoretical conclusion that it is a form of 'indirect dowry'. By this, he means wealth that is passed to the conjugal couple from the husband's side rather than the wife's. As indirect dowry, Goody postulates that the *mahr* acts as a form of pre-mortem inheritance, representing a 'transfer of property that includes women' or indirectly including the 'status of offspring of both sexes' (1973:17). This type of direct or indirect bilateral practice Goody terms 'diverging devolution', the inheritance equivalent of not putting all one's eggs in one basket. Like dowry, Goody regards the *mahr* as part of a 'familial or conjugal fund, which passes down from holder to heir' (1973:17). Goody's insights chime with the 'temporal connectivity' I found in many accounts similar to the *doctora*'s, which highlighted the *mahr* as a form of property transmission which includes women and whose effects span generations. However, because Goody does not delve into the variability of *mahr* practices in relation to its 'ideal' form, as a gift from the groom specifically to the bride as her wealth alone, he ignores the implications of pre-mortem inheritance specifically from a husband (whose estate will be divided between their children and possibly other male agnates on his death), to a wife. In

this respect, he underestimates the place ‘diverging devolution’ might have in supporting the role played by women in influencing future outcomes with such resources, and the social meaning this creates.

Following Goody’s insight on ‘diverging devolution’, Schlegel and Eloul (1988) extrapolate that the *mahr* is destined ultimately for the grandchildren of the household, hypothesising that the *mahr* is a means by which nuclear families can establish property rights (though not actually separate) in large extended or polygamous families. Their hypothesis leads them to suggest that the *mahr* is ‘typologically intermediate’ between bridewealth and dowry as it contains features of both (1988:302). While property originates with the groom’s household and returns to it, this property undergoes a change *en route*. It becomes vested in the new daughter-in-law and her children; the remainder of the household may have usage rights, but not ownership rights, making it a form of mediated property. This suggests that the horizontal transfer of property at marriage is linked to ongoing vertical qualities of property transferral between generations over time. Consequently the diachronic processes of social change within which the *mahr* acts, and is an effect of, require further consideration.

Moors’ study of women and property in the Palestinian West Bank region of Nablus between 1920-1980 shows how generational cohort and socio-economic position impacted upon the conditions and meaning of the *mahr* (1989; 1995). Although many of the older women she spoke to were from the same generation, economic status in particular divided their interactions with the institution of the *mahr*. Where women’s agricultural labour was valued, the *mahr* appears similar to classic descriptions of bridewealth as it was largely given to the father. However, in her account this did not appear to confer complete rights over the bride onto the groom’s family, with rural women in the first half of the 19th century often maintaining close social and economic links with their natal kin (Granqvist 1931; Moors 1995). Consequently, even when *mahr* practices held qualities of bridewealth it cannot be glossed as enabling absolute rights or ownership over brides. Moreover the ‘use’ value of such a transaction varied across time, place and socio-economic class. Thus for poor urban women who might receive a fragment of their *mahr*, this represented a far more relevant source of property than for wealthy women who

received the entirety of their *mahr* among a host of other property and access to wealth. Like the *doctora* at Abu Nour, the women Moors interviewed, regardless of status and locale, often invested in productive property such as orchards and buildings, which became invaluable as a resource in the social and political turmoil, with families losing male breadwinners, in the West Bank. Such women in a position to use their *mahr* as productive property regarded it in a similar way to any earnings they had received from paid employment. This contrasts with related practices of women gifting inheritance property claims to their brothers in exchange for social claims of support. Finally, changes in regional economic and social outlook led to the registering of the token *mahr* (for example, 1 Jordanian Dinar), thus simultaneously allowing men under financial pressure to wed and couples to assert the importance of conjugal unity over religious tradition. What Moors' archival and life-story accounts show is that, as a social practice, it is the interaction between generations and historically-specific property relations which impacts upon wider patterns of distribution in relation to the *mahr*.

When speaking of her father's physical looks and attitude towards divorce, Mawiyah's mother Suhar made a tacit connection between family inheritance of personal (moral?) conduct/practice, whether and how it is transmitted, the *mahr* and the stability of marriage. In this specific formulation, a strict rule about divorce being impossible² is directly linked to the demands/expectations of a potential bride/s family concerning marriage prestations, a house and the *mahr*. The causality within her statement is striking; it is the lack of divorce that she asserts created this harmony rather than the lack of divorce being the result of wider harmony. In Suhar's narrative of the past, this harmony meant that other demands such as the *mahr* were limited. The concepts of stability, conjugal living arrangements and the marriage prestation of the *mahr* were offered by my Damascene friends and interviewees in a plethora of different formulations, often in conjunction with a model of past exchange contrasted with present practices. So what can be learnt from the past, contemporary and changing nature of Damascene marriage and its material and

² Note that Mawiyah's maternal grandfather's own mother was Christian along with several other female members of their family. Although I cannot know how this might have influenced attitudes towards marriage in this family, the interlacing of Muslim and Christian ethics around correct marriage practices was often discussed by my informants, suggesting one framework of comparison within and beyond the past in which family-specific decisions might be made.

narrative components that is anthropologically enlightening? In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the level of work required to reach the point of marriage, even when things go smoothly. By considering the *mahr* and the narratives which contextualise it, I suggest it is possible to clarify when and how that work is made visible and may appear as wealth, or rather how value and meaning are made from marital activity (Strathern 1988).

Value has multiple connotations; it has a direct meaning, as in how valuable something (or someone) is, but can also be used in the sense of values, of aspirations and what is held dear, what principles we use to judge the world. It is precisely the sense of historical and situational ‘value’ which surrounds the *mahr* that gives it ongoing parlance and ‘temporal connectivity’ for my Damascene informants. Consider here Hiba giving her summary of how marriage has changed, her ambiguous placement of the *mahr* and the layering of value she makes through it:

In the past in Damascus, a woman was so proud to have her body covered with gold from her wrist to her elbow. And also women would put land as mahr in the contract. But the father wrote it, not the bride.

Now it's more important that the groom buys everything, the clothes for the marriage. Eight pairs of trousers, tops, a suit and special dress, he must give her the money for the underwear & lingerie. Really poor families just buy the furniture for the bedroom.

You know there are some funny stories about the mahr. Like some really poor families ‘sell’ their daughters to rich men but for a big mahr and a house of everything... I mean like rich Saudis come here and buy girls with the mahr.

In some respects, Hiba’s assertion neatly sums up a local model of social change for which the *mahr* practices act as an indicator. A system where women are prized highly enough to be dripping in gold but who are under the control of their fathers is increasingly replaced by one that emphasises women’s legal rights as separate actors.

This is joined by practical consumption in the form of household goods, yet the slide into consumer capitalism is made scary by the possibility of those (others) with spending power who can then buy brides through a corrupt legality. The exchange of property for women might appear to be similar but clearly the valuation of ‘the bride’, ‘the marriage’ and the nature of the exchange is qualitatively different from both an indigenous and anthropological outlook. What Hiba’s assertion suggests is that the ‘value’ is intrinsically linked to the (specific) material items that are transacted at marriage and the ‘intention’ with which the transactions are conducted. This joining of specific items and intentions is then linked to historical change. Sixty years ago, Saudi’s were unlikely to be rich enough to ‘buy girls’ from Damascus³. Through marriage prestations and values, seemingly quotidian matters of bangles, bedroom furniture and lingerie speak to wider economic and political trends as experienced by Damascenes. Moreover, the specific transaction of the *mahr* is one that may shift registers from that of a gift, where things and persons are variously personified, to a commodity where ‘things’ and persons may be understood as ‘things’, that might be owned or their products might be owned by themselves or others. Consequently, it is not only the *mahr* which is ambiguous as possessing qualities of ‘gift’ and ‘commodity’ but also people, most obviously brides. I now turn to narratives elicited when I asked about the *mahr*, which illustrate its recent use as a prestation in the form of a transaction containing facets of commodity exchange for a very different purpose to the ‘buying’ of girls.

Negotiating engagement through the *mahr*

In the previous chapter, an ideal type of negotiation was presented. Even within this ideal, tensions were evident. Here, I want to consider more what might be at stake when processes go wrong. Marriage negotiations breaking down, love affairs failing

³ Saudi Arabia’s wealth and power in the region was a sore point for many Syrians, resentful of Saudis coming to Damascus and Syria for the comparative cool of the summer, inflating rents, driving around in big ‘Hummers’ and splashing money about when only a generation or so before they were living in squalid conditions in the Desert whilst Damascenes sat in their cool, sophisticated courtyards making business deals as they had for centuries. Conversely, many wealthy Bedouin in the past freely crossed the border with Saudi Arabia, owning large houses in Damascus and maintaining links with other established families until the 1980s, thus making their position integral to Damascene society rather than other or foreign (Lancaster 1981).

and marital incompatibility are emotionally, financially and socially problematic for both men and women. For women, however, the stakes are often higher and this perhaps represents one of the most lived experiences of gendered and age-inflected inequality in contemporary Damascus. Certainly, it was the problems faced by women when processes around marriage went wrong which were identified by my informants, male and female, young and old, as exhibiting gendered double standards. This was not least because it delayed and hindered the sought-after successful marriage considerably more for women, for whom divorce could often become an official designation, making the means of negotiation and flexibility around marriage a topic of great interest. Here I present three cases which make clear the terms and choices of what is at stake and illustrate how the deleterious effects might be mitigated, not least by the intervention and experience of other kin and the ambiguous tension of the *mahr*.

Abeer: love, sickness & acceptance

Many accounts of problematic processes of courtship and marriage stages which I collected emphasised the level of emotional turmoil felt when hopes and agendas did not tally between the concerned parties. These affective dilemmas were often so extreme that potential brides and grooms, were keen to dwell on the physical symptoms of illness such tensions created. Thus Abeer, who was under the custodianship of her uncle after her father's death and mother's subsequent re-marriage and move to northern Syria, described the machinations of an unsuccessful courtship through the terms of sickness it created. She explained how her uncle had received word of her relationship from a family friend who had seen them on the street and immediately contacted her uncle. Enraged, her uncle came straight from work to take her off the street, much to her humiliation:

After this problem I was so sick and he (her boyfriend) was sick, neither of us could leave our beds. I said, 'I want this boy!'... I became so sick, I went to hospital.

Dramatic responses were often presented by younger informants as evidence of their emotional attachment and a primary route to asserting their own wishes. The demonstrable effects of Abeer and her boyfriend's separation were enough to persuade her uncle to attempt a negotiation with the family of her boyfriend:

My family was so worried my uncle decided to speak to him and his family... they (her boyfriend's family) wanted a bride only; they didn't want to give a house. So they made an arrangement, half from his father and half from my uncle. They agreed instalments would pay back my uncle for a house. I thought this was for my sake. I thought everything was settled, slowly I regained my health. Then my uncle changed his mind. He became hard and he made the conditions hard. The mahr became expensive, more expensive. Even with half his money he said the house must be fully furnished.

Here, Abeer's uncle had used the terms of the *mahr* negotiation to reassert control over a marriage he was not happy about. In Abeer's account, he had used it as a 'test'. Although her fiancé and his family had failed the 'test' by not being prepared to meet the terms of her uncle's demands, instead expecting him to pay for half, Abeer was ambivalent about his tactics. Eventually, the heartache and tensions caused between her and her affianced and within her family caused Abeer to change her mind and relinquish that particular marital prospect. Abeer remained upset about the outcome but was also ultimately supportive of her uncle's decision, stressing to me how much it illustrated the care he took over her as his ward. This illustrates a common process of push and pull between different family members as terms, especially financial, are negotiated around and through the *mahr*. Consequently we can see the way that the *mahr* can become the focus of diverse concerns and power struggles which may all be relevant to shaping a successful marriage but are otherwise hard to translate and compare.

Dhallal: family mercy & returning the *mahr*

Many young women, and some young men, to whom I spoke recounted how they had been the ones to prevent a marriage process completing. Dhallal had been engaged before deciding she could not go through with the marriage. Like many women in their late teens and early twenties whom I interviewed, her engagement had included the signing of the contract (*kitab al-kitaab*) meaning they were legally married. She explained that although he appeared on paper as an ideal match she ‘*didn’t feel well about it... he was a little snobby (shāyef ḥālo (colloq.))*’. Her family had eventually acquiesced to her decision to cancel the engagement but Dhallal extrapolated ‘*to be honest, my family don’t empathise with my decision but they know it is mine to make*’. This acceptance she linked specifically to the role played by her maternal grandparents who, she emphasised, ‘*treat you with more mercy (raḥmei)*’ than parents and paternal family. Their greater understanding and intervention she suggested had encouraged her to claim her rights during the process, something she linked directly to how she had utilised her *mahr*:

The conditions for the mahr were 100,000 SYP immediate and 400,000 SYP deferred. Of course I didn’t take the 400,000 SYP deferred mahr, I could have, and I also returned the 100,000 SYP mahr to him and absolutely everything else, I did not have to but my family suggested it... and I’m glad I gave back everything, now I don’t have any real obligations to him even if it says divorced on my identity card.

From her experience of an unsuccessful marriage negotiation, Dhallal had consolidated her understanding of what marriage transactions were:

The mahr is not important, really not. If a man loves a girl they don’t need this guarantee (ḍamān)... Really I would see a house as more important.

Rasha: a younger sister & Islam

Recounting the example of her sister's unhappy marriage and then her own recent decision to break off an engagement, Rasha considered attitudes towards the terms of marriage as changing swiftly:

...because the culture has changed, I feel, al-ḥamdala, Islam has given me the solution, so why don't I use it? It is people who make these things difficult... in the conditions of the contract I have the right to divorce if I return the mahr. If my husband forgets me, is not compatible, I will take my freedom. It is only people who say, 'You will complete your life with him', not God.

So when I decided to end my engagement my sister told me, 'This is good, I wish I'd had the courage'. At the time of the Prophet – peace be upon him – he said to a woman, 'If you say 'I do not like my husband', you can take your divorce, just return what he gave you.'

The sentiment of changing opportunities and the use of examples and intervention from kin was a repeated theme in accounts of recent marriage negotiations. From these accounts, it is possible to see young women in tight spots negotiating with their families and, from their point of view, wider social judgements. The contract, the *mahr* and their corollary gifts are presented as ambiguous and flexible. Dhallal and Rasha were able to extricate themselves from unions they were not happy with before the point of consummation through their use of religious piety, and appealing to the mercy of their families. The exchange aspect of the *mahr* allowed Dhallal to return it and, if not undo the transactions, then at least nullify its effects. By treating the *mahr* as a transaction commodity, Abeer's uncle, Dhallal and Rasha were able to negotiate some of the terms of the *mahr* as 'gift' from groom to bride. This flexibility is central to what the *mahr* can do; it was also premised on the examples of others and comparison with past models.

Senior narratives

In this section, I present a variety of accounts of past practices and models from older informants alongside some of the responses they elicited from young kin. As Cowan (1990) points out, ‘standing closer’ to listen to narratives often involves accounting for the entanglement of the contexts and plots in which a subject of interest is woven (1990: 90). Although the *mahr* may operate as a useful indicator of (as well as an affective form of) property transmission, it is not necessarily every Damascene’s focus. Rather, it weaves in and out of concerns around wider property relations and transmission, affective bonds and personal experience. In this way, narrative plots, which construct significant wholes from sets of events (Ricoeur 1979:17), frame and in some ways tame the flow of past experience and memory. In the narratives presented, meaning, especially causal meaning, is imparted in an array of styles which illustrate both monologic rhetoric of a reified past and a dialogic tendency of the plurality of experiences that make them (Bakhtin 1981: 270-2; Hill 1986:92; Holquist 1990). The heteroglossia that inhabits these narratives as they are transmitted, even when primarily to the ethnographer, shows how narrative itself can be seen as form of ‘public time’ that reciprocally creates such narratives as events in themselves, as they are produced in a processual dialogue with social others (Bakhtin 1981; Gilsensan 1996). The rhetorical and narrative devices contained within the varying accounts, from personal memories, to synthesised depictions of life in the past, to historical documents, all contain explicit intention and implicit intentionality. By intentionality, I mean their focus towards something, which acts as a constraint on the possibilities of understanding experience and shaping expectation. Yet as Bakhtin postulates, dialogue and narrative are not only events in one moment containing discrete intentionality; as utterances and stories they are also populated with the intentions of others, past, imagined and even potential (1981:293-4). In the context of my informants, they are often imbued with the layering of multiple generations’ decision-making, interpretation of appropriate marital practice and lived understandings of how that has changed.

Hajji: gifts make people closer

A small woman in her late 80s who rarely ventured outside of her flat, Hajji was the landlady of a teacher friend, Fatima. As an unmarried woman from Dar'a in the south of Syria, Fatima boarded along with several other girls in Hajji's tiny flat in Rukn ad-deen on the mountainside. One afternoon, Hajji, Fatima and I sat around the baby-pink Formica table that dominated her tiny kitchen and matched her slippers and house-*hijab*. Sipping *zūrāt* (*colloq.*) (flower tea) Hajji agreed to me taking notes on her engagement, wedding and marriage. This was a topic that we had discussed on previous visits and I would suggest from her initial reticence and the way she abstracted her narrative by speaking not of 'I' but 'the bride' which was then followed by emotion and the articulation of a frank opinion, she had been thinking about our past conversations on the topic.

Hajji: I pray for Fatima, she is such a sweet girl, to be honest sweeter than my own daughters. I pray that Fatima will find a good husband, because you know it is hard for her with her dark skin (Fatima laughingly replied 'Thank you Sitt Hajji')... not like you, your husband must be very pleased with you...how much mahr did you say he gave you?

She was shocked when I told her I did not receive a mahr.

Hajji: I will pray for you as well! At least I received a mahr. I had that, my husband loved me... he used to come home and dance with me, (she mimed a shuffling dance with her hands in the air)... then he gave me the silk night dress... he always wanted me! This was a new one, the bride is given one as her trousseaux and she wears it in the morning after the wedding. Then she gives a dressing gown, pyjamas and slippers to the groom for him, so he gives her 300SYP for this, in the morning as well.

Bethany: Is this what you received?

Hajji: Yes, this is what I was given, but he gave me a new one sometimes... ah it was a love marriage.

Bethany: What else happened around your wedding?

Hajji: Well on the morning of the wedding, a scarf and night clothes were given to my mother-in-law. In the past it was everyone, everyone received new night clothes.

Bethany: Who gave the night clothes?

Hajji: I've forgotten ḥabībī... in turn the mother-in-law will give the bride some money. I just remember this, I don't remember what happened to me.

Bethany: Why this exchange? What is the reason of all these gifts on the wedding day?

Hajji: Well it's to make people closer (as if I am stupid for asking). Both our families lived in Muhajareen, and were shi'a. But we did not know each other because my family was from Hama. I didn't love him before the marriage... I didn't know what love was about, I was only 16.

Fatima interjects: Hajji you said you were about 13 years old when you married last time you spoke, was it 13 or 16?

Hajji, begins to look flustered her rheumy grey eyes are moist and like oysters. She stands and picks up the cups and nervously hums.

Fatima: Hajji what's wrong? (to me) I think she is embarrassed, she was 13 which is only a child.

Hajji (sitting back down): Now fiancées can visit fiancés in the house, my small granddaughter was engaged to another relative, someone from her mother's family, and they broke up. She was 16 which is too young, his behaviour was bad, he insulted her father's name. Now she is older, around 19, her new fiancé is a very handsome tailor. Some people say that in the past it was better but I think it's better now... because you get a house of your own. I lived in the house of my family-in-law, his parents, brothers, cousins and their wives together, it was better later when my husband inherited his own house to put me in. When I had my first four children I had to have them at home, my mother

was dead so my mother-in-law was there... after I had two children in hospital, this is so much better.

In this account, Hajji equates the *mahr* with her husband's love for her and with his physical attraction to her and as such the nature of her 'value' as a bride, a wife and a woman. Secondly, Hajji regards the *mahr* as a gift that is distinct from, but related to, other sets of gifts that were exchanged as part of 'the wedding'. These gifts 'make people closer' according to her understanding, but her final comments about living and giving birth in the home of her in-laws suggest that despite these prestations, she was never sentimentally close to her husband's family. This movement between the personal recollection of 'I' and 'she' or more commonly 'the bride' was, as previously discussed, common among informants, especially those who were older and/or had seen/organised their own children's weddings. As in this case, it was often ambiguous whether 'the bride' was a kind of alterity with one's past self, a way of describing events that took place at a distance or a more generalised view of an ideal type of bride and her procedures. Finally Hajji expresses strong sentiments. Her customary vagueness is gone when she speaks about the changes between her youth and the present through her granddaughter. Not only is she criticising her family-in-law and past practices such as 13-year-old girls marrying, she is also criticising their contemporary apologists who believe that the past was better than the present.

Hajji was in a tense relationship with her remaining family, in particular her sons. Her tiny apartment was situated in a block of cement flats that her sons had erected on the site of Hajji's husband's inherited house that she had been 'put in' after spending several years living in her in-law's house. According to Hajji's narration of her life story, this house had been left to her by her husband but soon after he had died she had agreed to hand over the deeds to her four sons who then developed the site in exchange for their support. Having been mistress of a moderate-sized courtyard house (*beit 'arabī*) shaded by vines, Hajji was largely confined to two small rooms, a toilet and kitchen from which her children extracted half the rent of the girls who lodged with her along with the other apartments in the block. According to Fatima, this was a travesty; in exchange for her property rights, her children should have paid greater care to her well-being. Hajji had not been accorded

the same value by her children she had had under her husband, which Fatima suggested was the pitfall of a ‘love marriage’ as Hajji often recounted how reliant she had been on her husband who did so much for her out of love. This, Fatima explained, ‘gets in the way of a mother’s relationship with her children, especially her sons who will take care of her in her dotage’.

When I asked Hajji if I could see a copy of her marriage contract, she seemed surprised and it took a while to ascertain that she did not have a marriage contract but rather what is termed a ‘common marriage’ (*zauwāj ‘arfī/ ma’rūf (colloq.)*), a state slightly more common among *shi’a* families in Syria in the past. For Hajji, this marriage was official (*rasmī*) like a legally contracted one since it was still sanctioned by a *sheikh* and contained the requisite marriage transactions, a sentiment that is echoed by the emphasis made by Damascenes on the celebration and gifts at the wedding over and above the legal formalities. Fatima speculated that because Hajji was so young her family and/or family-in-law were unwilling to have the marriage registered. This may be so, but the court records for the time period show many girls under the age of 16 registered, some as young as 12. It is now impossible to know the reason since those who orchestrated this marriage were all dead and buried for Hajji to visit in the nearby cemetery, where she wove laurel leaves among their headstones and epitaphs, on the Friday *‘Īd al-aḏḥā*.

Abu and Umm Mamoun: Performing a long marriage

Abu and Umm Mamoun were of a similar age to Hajji, with Abu Mamoun a few years older in his early 90s. Abu Mamoun still owned a barber’s shop which his sons and grandsons now ran. He was born in Damascus but his father was a seed trader who had moved to live in Haifa until 1948 when the family returned to live permanently in Damascus. Umm Mamoun was a younger cousin and so she also spent her childhood between Damascus and Haifa. I collected many of their recollections, Abu Mamoun often insisting on conveying his experiences in English, until his listening grandchildren beseeched him to ‘talk in Arabic *Jedī*’. Both Abu and Umm Mamoun seemingly told their life-stories to amuse their assembled children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren as much as to inform me. They did this by employing different manners of expression and performance:

Abu Mamoun: I was 18 when they proposed to me the idea of marriage. My maternal family knew me well. The father of my future wife was of a respectable position.

Then the Damascenes always asked among each other: so they asked about us... about me. They came to our house three, four times then we asked Umm Ahmad, 'Would you give your daughter to our son?' ... 'leish-lā?!' 'Why not?!' (the reply)

This nonchalant reply of 'leish-lā' was echoed laughingly around his assembled children and grandchildren. Not to be outdone Umm Mamoun began her own account, which she knowingly contrasted with her husband's laconic style, cocking her head and batting her eyelashes demurely.

Umm Mamoun: My house was new and I was a blushing bride. My neighbour would ask me, 'I am working here and sending money to my children in the U.S... my husband is an old man... I do everything, what do you do?'

You see I had been spoiled at my family's house too... we had six boys... one of my brothers had a garage in Lebanon, he'd always come back to pay me a special visit. Even my maternal uncle (khālī) would come and visit me, he was worried about me despite having 6 girls and 9 boys of his own to take care of. We would play together in the lane/neighbourhood (ḥāra) as children, all between the houses... So I knew my husband a little already... of course he was my cousin.

I don't remember much about the engagement; I was a bit small, about 15. I remember we would cook together, Damascene food, everyone was invited.

[Later]

Abu Mamoun: You ask us about the mahr... all I can say is that because we were cousins we kept the mahr small. But when I

made some money, and my shop was successful I bought my little girl (by which he means Umm Mamoun) some gold and a holiday.

Later, Umm Mamoun proudly showed me the suite of bedroom furniture they had bought when their youngest daughter married, to replace the cheaper wedding furniture. Umm Mamoun's daughter Nada, now in her early 40s, accompanied us and joked to her mother, 'Oh, so this is like your *mahr*, you just got it *after doing the work!*' Umm Mamoun replied, laughing, 'I chose it. I suppose it makes up for not being covered in gold!'

Labour becomes work & work becomes visible

That the advanced *mahr* be spent on household items and the conjugal fund was a common tale of women discussing their *mahr* along with gold items they had received at the point of marriage. In this sense, necessity, the labour of daily life, with young children to provide for, the specificities of the *mahr* and marriage gifts became muddled and elided into other forms of property. However, nearly as common as recollections giving up this property to supplement the conjugal fund was their replacement or substitution later in life, which Umm Mamoun's daughter directly linked with having achieved the 'work' the *mahr* was often conceptualised as intended recompense for. For example, Buthaina proudly showed me some gold jewellery her husband had bought her 23 years after she had been required to give up her wedding property, including the *mahr* and gold. She had wanted the complete set in one go, but her husband was slowly buying back individual pieces and had opened a bank account for her as his income had grown in recognition of the sacrifice she had made when they first married. Similarly, Miriam's husband, now in his 70s, concerned that their sons would not provide for her if he himself died, had registered a whole block of flats that he had slowly built in the previous two decades, and the rent they accrued, in her name. This he told me, he saw as compensation for the way in which inflation had reduced the value of her *mahr* saying, 'I should have given her some land then, but at the time it was fashionable to register money and how could we know the future?' Yet importantly, although this action was generous, he was

unwilling to help his daughter whose husband in Sharjah had died whilst she was in Damascus, leaving her and her three young children unable to access any of her assets as she could not return to the Emirates without her husband's visa. Instead, Abu Bilal said cheerfully, 'Her mother can sort it out, she has money now, they can stay in this house and sleep with their grandmother', implying that he had devolved responsibility to his wife through the property he had registered as hers. These accounts suggest the layering of investments made through marriage transactions of the *mahr*. They demonstrate the potential for 'temporal connectivity' it contains through the choices individuals make at different points in their life-cycles and the inter-generational qualities they contain.

In their analysis of the *mahr*, Schlegel and Eloul (1988) regard all marriage transactions as mechanisms by which households provide for labour needs, distribute property and maintain or enhance status. By focusing on marriage transactions in relation to household management, they formulate a contrast between bridewealth, which circulates property, and dowry and indirect dowry (including the *mahr*), which concentrate property (1988:291). This concentration of property they contend is evidenced by the prevalence of dowry and the *mahr* in places with significant differences in wealth, where private property, especially land, is at a premium and where containment of wealth within the household is linked to strategies for the maintenance of power and status (1988:294). The *mahr*, they suggest, is integral to this by allowing for separate reproductive units to assert themselves in contexts of polygamous or extended household composition. Their analysis suggests an ongoing cyclical process of differentiation through the *mahr*, while Moors' (1995) historically situated account suggests that this analysis actually describes an emergent process of regional social change. I would suggest that for my informants, these two processes of life-course and social change are intertwined.

Several of my senior informants recounted shifts in household composition, the content or furnishings of houses and the resources, such as the *mahr*, used to enact this as part of their marriage narratives. For example, from childhood to old age, Hajji had been subject to and contributed to several changes in household composition. As a child, she recalled living in one room of a courtyard house that was shared between her fathers' brothers and male cousins. This was a common

recollection among senior Damascenes from poor backgrounds who often recounted problematic and long standing rows between their mothers and other women in the same building, related by marriage, caused by the unsolicited use of their domestic items such as stoves and washing buckets. Senior women often linked these childhood experiences into their own marriage accounts by stressing that even when they knew they would have to share a home with their mother-in-law for some time they would expect their own stove and kitchen space. Hajji regarded the period of early marriage and childbearing where she lived with her mother-in-law negatively in comparison to achieving her own home. In later life, her children had built apartments on the site of her former house and utilised it as a source of income, apparently ignoring their father's wishes to provide for Hajji and in a sense utilising her deferred *mahr*.

In accounts both of the *mahr* and past household composition, discreteness was often attached to a wife/mother, rather than to her husband/father, by my informants. This was embodied within one key piece of standing furniture, which was often recalled in passing by both senior men and women from their childhood, or in a couple of instances owned by a living woman. The only piece of standing furniture poor women of this generation might own at the point of marriage was their bridal box (*ṣundūq 'arūs*), as described in the thesis introduction. The bridal boxes remembered and owned by my informants were small, simple affairs such as that owned by Ruqqiyya, who had been repudiated (unilaterally divorced) by her husband in the early 1960s and, never re-marrying, had lived with her brother and then her son. It stood around two feet high, two feet wide and one-and-a-half feet deep, with a simple flower design mostly of inlaid bone with one fragment of mother of pearl in its dusty wood surface. Within Ruqqiyya's bridal box she kept a small collection of items given to her at the point of marriage by her natal family in 1950. These comprised: her Qur'an; one remaining *ḥayāyya* ('snakes', a gold bracelet given to her by her mother as new); some spare shawls for winter; and finally her shroud and some oils with which to anoint her body when she died. Added to these objects, meant to sustain her through her life-cycle events, were some of her homemade moisturiser and family photographs, especially of a daughter she had lost to childbirth in the late 1970s. In addition, she explained she had been given clothes for all the

seasons and some extra bedding. Thus the basic complement for her personal needs was provided by her natal kin. Ruqqiyya and her granddaughter Rana were unwilling or unable to offer analyses of what the bridal box and its contents meant. However, a cousin Shams (whose accounts are discussed shortly) responded to my questioning assuredly:

It means she gets everything from her family as a symbol of power. It is about who has authority over her body. Because the groom's family had a lot of power over the new bride, these things were a kind of protection (ḥimāya) for her from her family... She also had a whole year's worth of clothes in her box for summer and winter, this was very important that she was provided for every season, for everything. This is so that she does not go by herself to the marriage.

As an item of furniture, these bridal boxes were intensely private and personal. It was only with the help of Ruqqiyya's granddaughter Rana that I was able to see such a box. Other descriptions of these pieces of furniture as remembered items seemed to stress how they were a private space within the home for women, mysterious and containing personal items. Given the context of tension described by several of the women between their mother and father's kin and their own descriptions of tension between them and their husband's female kin, it seems important to stress that boxes' contents were described by the couple of women who still owned them as 'from my family' and 'my heart'. From the accounts offered from memory and the few still-existing examples, the bridal box as a form of property and a form of domestic furniture can be seen to encompass elements of both the eventful and the mundane, including implements of daily life such as clothes and a washing cup for the *ḥammām sūq*: a daily life that makes an effort to be in some ways private and personalised to the individual married woman. This individualisation is reiterated by the way these boxes were typically disposed of after the death of the owner, rather than being kept as mementos or heirlooms. In part, this is because domestic aesthetics have limited room for such antiques, but is also connected to the manner in which such boxes moved in tandem through the life-cycle with their bride, marking

the special occasions of a woman's life from marriage, through childbirth and finally to death. In descriptions of remembered household composition made of multiple units in an agnatic group, the bridal box was emphasised as a form of property which marked discrete reproductive groups via women. The personalisation with the wife was so pronounced, transmission of these objects to younger generations was rare.

Ruqqiyya explained that she had been divorced by her husband because she had supported their son's wish to stay at school, despite her husband's insistence he leave school to work. When Ruqqiyya had been repudiated by her husband, she had claimed her deferred *mahr* and invested it in her brother's shop. Later, she had used the returns on this investment to support her son's completion of studies. In its 'temporal connectivity' the *mahr* overlaps and contrasts with the bridal box. Both *mahr* and bridal box share a facet of specificity in relation to the bride who receives them. In this respect, they often embody elements of a woman's value within a particular marital and familial context, and they are linked to her life-course beyond marriage as a rite of passage. Each contains individually-specific groupings of temporal personhood; however there are also important differences. The bridal box appears to have been consistently the personal property of the bride, inextricably linked to her life-course from marriage to the point of death. The evidence from the life-stories, practices and understandings of my informants suggests that the *mahr*, as a transaction which connects two parties and is divided into two parts, has a more collaborative and instrumental role to play in shaping the process of what it is to be married. The dynamic tensions of the *mahr* emphasise the specificity of the bridal box and vice-versa.

Kiba fingers

I turn now to the moral content and intention of accounts of the past which resonate with Suhar's association between the *mahr*, divorce and her daughter Mawiyah's predicament. Basso's (1988; 1996) and Gilsenan's (1996) considerations of narratives explore how accounts of the past often contain focused moral content. The mode of transmission and content of accounts of the past, they suggest, can be directed towards current predicaments and offer generalised or specific warnings. In

this way, the transmission of a reified past emphasised the layer of explicit moralising and intention they contained. The narratives already discussed were often quite specific in their addressivity and were also replete with dialogic plurality, through the voices, concerns and manners of telling. None of them strongly adhered to a generic meta-narrative of past family practices; however, they did make reference to more nostalgic accounts of the past, such as Hajji's reference to others believing the past was better than the present. In this section, I present an example of the nostalgic styles and situated contexts in which past accounts of marriage were often conveyed to me and transmitted to younger kin. Through comparison with court records, these nostalgic accounts are explicitly revealed to prioritise a rhetorical form of truth. By this, I mean they present monologic accounts which stress the superiority and absolutism of perceived past practices. From the example I present, I also illustrate how these monologic and dialogic concerns spill beyond narratives and into the practices of a present ongoing marriage.

One evening, I was invited to stay the night with Shams and her three young children while her husband was away on a business trip. Shams had been introduced to me as someone who came from a Damascene family (rather than being an immigrant) and whose family maintained and knew about Damascene 'traditions'. When I arrived, her mother and a family friend Malika with her teenage daughter Leila were there and Shams explained to me that since they often referred knowledgably to the past, they would be more useful than she. Her small living room and kitchen was a hive of activity as the four women made a selection of *kiba*⁴ and children played excitedly around them. Shams joked that she had organised this party on my behalf so I could learn about Damascene marriage and how to make *kiba* simultaneously. The labour was divided between the women, with Shams scuttling between the kitchen where she was preparing the mix of lean minced lamb and drained fine bulgur wheat, and the accompanying sauces and lentil soup. Meanwhile, her mother, Malika and Leila sat cross-legged on the rug in baggy house-clothes, pushing *kiba* mix through a machine like a sausage-maker to make a long, hollow tube of raw lamb mince and bulgur wheat. This they would cut into short lengths,

⁴ Kiba is often described as the national dish of both Syria and Lebanon and comes in a large variety of forms.

before pinching one end closed, stuffing with a spiced lamb, onion and walnut mix, and finishing by nipping closed at the other end.

Despite Shams' friendly hospitality and assurances that I would be taught everything about Damascene marriage and *kiba*, her mother and friends were reticent to talk to me about their life experiences. Rather they concentrated on the serious work at hand, keen to ascertain my ability (or lack thereof) to make *kiba*. Malika made a ball of the *kiba* mix and gruffly explained that the machine was really a cheat and that to make really good *kiba* it needed to be done by hand. 'Look at my daughter's hands', she said gesturing, 'if you want to know about marriage you should watch her make *kiba*, she has good *kiba* fingers. They're a gift like beauty or wealth, Damascene husbands used to look at the *kiba* before they looked at the face'. Leila shyly showed me how she deftly hollowed out and shaped the *kiba* mix into a delicate shell of a pocket before stuffing it and squeezing it closed with her gifted digits.

After patiently helping me to make a couple of small lumpy bullets of *kiba*, Shams bustled off to the kitchen commanding the others to tell me about marriage in the past and slowly the women warmed to the topic. As with other narratives and conversations I collected on the topic of material and immaterial property transmission in Damascene marriages past and present, processes of material mediation and social transformation are conveyed as distinct yet still interwoven. Thus Leila's 'kiba fingers' were obviously a source of pride to Malika, however, the knowledge of how to make *kiba* and utilise this gift had to be learnt and re-learned. Thus during the course of the interview Shams would repetitively enter into the living room to question her mother and Malika about the *kiba* recipe or to taste what she had prepared. From previous visits to her house, I knew that Shams was a skilled cook and clearly knew very well how to prepare such food but because her mother and Malika were senior in age and position to her, she had to receive their blessing before continuing - ramifications of unilateral action included insult and the withdrawal of childcare. In a similar way, the conversation shows how Shams tried to convey to me a set of information about past practices and principles surrounding marriage, but differed to her mother and Malika's recollections, details and a commentary on what past practices meant. It was primarily Malika who contributed

the rhetorical content, and her narratives were principally directed not at me but her own daughter Leila.

Malika: [In the past] there was no seeing/meeting of bride and groom. Never. Of course my generation could see each other after the engagement, but with lots of limits. But my mother's generation, my grandmothers generation, they were not allowed. There was a big difference between mine and my mother's. She died at 83 a few years ago and to be frank, her life was completely opposite to young people's now. This change is not good, because we have become too open to others. My family still keeps this tradition and younger ones like Leila [her daughter] can only see their fiancées if they are hijabed and chaperoned.

Shams: That's true, marriage in Damascus was the interest of the whole family and about the family, whether it was good. Also if she [the bride] was beautiful, that's why Damascene women are so valued and it was the mother who saw her first. You always need to marry from the same class in a good Muslim marriage. There should be no marriage between classes (ṭafrā) and the Damascenes were very talented at this.

Shams' mother: The reason marriage between classes is uncommon is because if a family has a noble name they want to keep it. So they have to find a woman that will keep them in the same class. Even poor families refuse to take a rich wife as she would look down on them very badly.

Malika: It's not just classes, it's family; my mother was my father's cousin. This kind of marriage was very common. Why? Because if a stranger came then the cousin had the right to kill him! If a girl was not proposed to by her cousin in Damascus then she became a spinster because no one else could engage her, since birth cousins were promised.

Shams' mother: It was such a big shame in Damascus for widows to marry again it never happened; spinsters and widows would just have to live with their eldest brother. Not like now, people do as they like.

It is unclear exactly what period in the past these women were referring to, if indeed any particular time other than what they regarded as the present. This aside, at the time Malika's mother and grandmother would have been married in the early part of the 20th century, the court records show evidence, if not a high incidence, of widowed and even repudiated/divorced women remarrying. Moreover, I found only a couple of recorded marriages where the bride and groom's status as cousins is obvious, suggesting that even if cousin marriage was dominant it was not automatically between first cousins or patri-cousins (*bint 'ammī*, Father's brother's daughter). This is not to say that either source, person or document, is incorrect in what it records/remembers. The historical documents represent only a tiny fragment of the marriage performed in Damascus; moreover as Hajji's account shows, not all marriages were registered in court records, meaning that it may be only exceptional cases which are represented in the historical records. Even so, these examples suggest that practices were more variable than asserted by such glosses as women not engaged to their cousins becoming spinsters, or that divorcees could not re-marry but were always relegated to the role of dependent daughter and/or sister. This highlights that the most important statements from Shams' mother and Malika were those of 'This change is not good, we have become too open to others' and 'Not like now, people do as they like'.

Shams: In the past a very essential feature was the ḥammām sūq. The women would go to the ḥammām sūq and see if the girl's hair was false or real, if she had good teeth, eyes and body, if there were defects or disabilities. But especially in Damascus it was ḥarām and aib for a mother to describe to her son the details of a girl's body and looks. She would just say that she was jamīla or not. No, she would not tell details.

*Malika [with disgust]: Now anyone can see, like I said it's too open...
My mother married when she was 11, she hadn't started her period,
this was the usual way. My father was 15 years older. It was always
like this, brides young and husbands older. She didn't know anything,
he knew everything, she had to live with her mother-in-law first.*

As Hajji's case reveals, the age of brides (and grooms) at the point of marriage is a fraught topic. In this instance, Malika seemed unperturbed that her mother was 11 when she was married and no one in the room commented on this but rather agreed matter-of-factly. Conversely, many families with similar narratives were often shocked at the young ages of marriage within and without their families' pasts. Court records from the first half of the 20th century show that although it may have been common for girls to marry under the age of 16 and that grooms were often older than their brides, this was by no means ubiquitous. Indeed, large age differences were often represented by the marriage of mature, often divorced or widowed individuals, male and female. Striking is the number of brides in these records who were considerably older than their grooms, suggesting that even if the preference was for grooms older than their brides, individuals and their families had other more pressing concerns or ways of getting around standard practice.

*Shams: The period of engagement was short because the prices were
not high then. During this time, the bride would live with her
mother-in-law in a private space.*

*Malika: The relationship with her mother-in-law (ḥamāt) was like girl
and her paternal aunt (khālt) and it was without justice/equity.
Her mother-in-law had authority and could ask her son to divorce
his wife without any guilt! [She sounds approving].*

*Shams: In the past, the mahr was sometimes money or gold coins...
often in the contract property such as a house, land or shop were
given as mahr or as well. In turn, the bride in Damascus had
always to get the marital mattress and the bedding. This was all
part of the trousseaux (jhaaz al'roos). The furniture agreement*

was that the groom bought everything for the bedroom made of wood.

Malika: Yes, the mahr was different, not like today. It was always golden lira and a maximum of 5 Syrian Pounds but in gold! That was very important. The bride's family would then use this money to buy things for the wedding, crockery and also furniture for the bedroom.

Shams: In Damascus, the things that the mahr did not include were all her dresses and underwear. Usually in other places the groom did and does everything, but in Damascus families would take from the mahr to pay or the bride would pay... A bride would also bring a sewing machine and other tools with her to show that she was a good housewife and clever with her hands.

Shams' mother: Damascene brides were known for being very talented [they all nod in agreement].

Shams: Throughout her engagement the bride would receive gifts... the first was just a ring, the second some bracelets and at the wedding lots of gold.

Shams' mother: Look, I still have some [she bares her wrist].

Shams: As preparation for the wedding, seven days before, the bride would be taken to the ḥammām sūq with her mother-in-law.

Malika: Ah yes it's true... when I was 17, my mahr was only 3,000 SYP. Really I was very cheap [she looks bitter]. We went to the ḥammām sūq, the women in the families and neighbours together... but I refused to undress. Usually the bride goes to the ḥammām sūq and all the women bathe her but I didn't want anyone to see my body... not after my mahr was only 3,000... but I did have henna [tattoos]... In the past it was strict. The relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was very strict. For example the bride could not eat until her mother-in-law began, and the parents would sit at the head of the table whilst she would sit in a minor place. Really in the past she was

not allowed to talk to her husband face to face. If she wanted to discuss something she had to talk to him from another room.

Leila: Through the wall!

Malika: Sometimes this did change when she had a son. But always she had to call him my lord (ya sīdī).

Shams's mother [cheekily]: You know it is an Islamic tradition that before sex both have to pray. This used to be common; my parents were always praying... it should still be!

Malika: When my grandparents were first married, about 1920, it was shameful for a woman to go to the market alone. It was shameful also in their generation or even my generation if a woman asked her husband to carry his son... now women expect their husbands to carry everything! Everything was shameful in the past, but this way was better actually in my opinion.

Throughout this conversation of overlapping narratives of the past, the features that stand out are its moral commentary on the behaviour and outlook of contemporary Damascene society. Malika offers the voice of approval for the past, laying down a solid picture of submissive younger wives, authoritative mothers-in-law and the importance of shame. Shams refrains from giving a strong sense of her opinion, preferring to historicise the information and present it as a treasured set of traditions. Shams' mother, the most senior woman, offers a limited commentary; like Hajji, she seems less concerned about the strictures of past marriages and more interested in the affective bonds that shaped them. Indeed, despite Malika's favourable commentary on past nostalgic forms, some of her comments appear somewhat tongue-in-cheek such as the lack of direct communication from wife to husband. I would suggest that in these instances, imagery of past sociality slides into hyperbole in order to emphasise the power-dynamics she is regarding favourably. Finally, Leila is almost silent, listening to the words of her mother, some of which appear to be directed at her or at least at the generational cohort in which she is growing up.

The narrative content, monologic and dialogic, and its addressivity were given another layer following the context of their telling, which at the time helped

contextualise the moralising content I was offered as an account of the past. While Shams cooked a batch of *kiba*, she received a phone call from a friend informing her that her husband, supposedly away on business in Jordan, had been seen by her in another part of Damascus. Shams became stressed, asking advice from her mother and Malika. In the course of a fretful conversation, it emerged that her husband had been unfaithful in the past. Shams protested that there must be a reason for her husband's movements, to which Malika replied curtly, 'What reason? If your husband travels without his mother what guarantee do you have?' and Shams pleaded, 'But perhaps there is a reason and he went to see a friend [male]' to which Malika said darkly, 'Who is he friends with, the devil?'

Referring to our earlier conversation and her frank admission of how a small *mahr* had made her feel, Malika followed her fierce comments with a wearier assessment. 'This is the problem now. We ask for a cheap *mahr* and expect a 'love-marriage' but it is no guarantee. That is why it is better in the past'. I take these comments to mean that she equated both the value placed on the bride as signalled by the *mahr* as important and the transactability it might contain as important for defining the terms of a marriage. Malika then had to return home, but Leila elected to remain. Shams tried desperately to phone her husband with no reply, although as it was still ringing it was still in Syria. She borrowed Leila's and then my phone to see if he was ignoring her but without success. Increasingly she became frantic, the children scolded, smacked and sent to the bedroom. Amongst this turmoil, the demure Leila turned to me and asked breathily, 'Is it true you can be friends with boys in Europe? I mean you can get to know them?' Unsure what line her questioning was taking, curiosity or reproach, I nodded and she responded, 'I wish to *Allah* I could have a boyfriend!' and she elaborated how important she thought it was to spend time with someone before marriage, countering her mother's sentiments suggesting that she may have listened passively to her mother's pointed moral commentary on then and now, but maintained opinions of her own.

When Shams' husband returned home, she said nothing but brought him a plate of fresh *kiba* and lentil soup with lemon slices. She watched him eat for a minute and then blurted out, 'My friend saw you, what were you doing in her neighbourhood?' to which he proceeded to explain how he had been stopped at the

border customs and arrested, spending the night and most of the day in a prison cell without his phone. Following his release a couple of hours previously, he had promptly gone to a contact to ensure he could carry out his business trip in the following few days. Still Shams was unconvinced so he produced a document to prove his arrest. She examined it closely, scrutinizing its integrity and passing it round the room for our inspection and witness. Eventually Shams softened and asked, ‘Why didn’t you pick up when I was calling you?’ He calmly replied, ‘I knew I was coming home, I didn’t want to worry you until I knew I was safe... ask your mother if this was the right thing to do’. Shams’ mother nodded her assent and Shams’ husband turned to Leila and I to explain matter-of-factly, ‘We used to fight (implying his mother-in-law) but now we are friends. We even put money in an account together for Shams, a deferred *mahr* for if I die.’ With relative calm restored, his three children clambered over his mountainous stomach and he laughed at their antics, telling me, ‘They miss me, this one Reema, she has been waiting for me to return to play with them! What do you think of my children, they are beautiful aren’t they?’

Since her husband had returned, Leila and I could not stay the night, and as Leila escorted me to catch a micro-bus *sūrfs* (*colloq.*), I commented to her that I had



Nostalgic accounts of past Damascene marriage practices offer warning and moral guidance between generations (Photo: exhibit at the Museum of Damascene Life).

felt awkward staying at Shams' house during such a complicated and personal moment and asked if I should have left to be polite for future reference. 'No!' Leila said shocked, 'that would have been terrible, then she would have thought we were not her friends, that we didn't care what happened. We had to stay just to be a support for her so she was not alone!' The narrative plot of this emotional event benefited, it seemed, from our witnessing of it. As observers, bearing witness to the event, we were implicated in its marital and narrative resolution. In this way narrative time is public time, in that as witnesses we were required to recollect what had occurred as evidence. Resolving problems such as those in marriage requires what Ricoeur calls 'inter-time' (1979:26), and I call temporal connectivity. This is the plurality over time that makes work visible through its outcomes which for my informants can range from continuing marital harmony, passed through generations, to its material evidence in the form of furniture and jewellery gifts for women in later life.

Conclusion

The diversity of temporal-generational dispositions presented in this chapter highlights the scaling of temporality and cross-subjectivity in practices of the *mahr* and narratives around the *mahr* and marriage which compare past with present. Through the *mahr* and past narratives, individuals and their families try to predict and ensure the future, their own and those of their children and dependent agnates. This is an example of decision-making which can be traced as an effect of and affecting changing patterns of marital sociality, meaning that the choices and bequests of a previous generation create the framework of possibility for the following generation and so on. In this way, the *mahr* embodies what Koselleck ([1979] 1985: 5) terms 'former futures'; the intermeshing of hopes, expectations and choices over time, which become reframed by new events yet continue to outline the field of meaning in which new arrangements are made.

The *mahr* has particular temporal connectivity, I suggest, because it is an ambiguous prestation/transaction, which contains a potential for dynamic tension between gift and commodity transaction. As a transaction which connects two parties

and is divided into two parts, the *mahr* continues to have a collaborative and instrumental role to play in shaping the process of what it is to be married. The material I present illustrates the importance of moral integrity within the Damascene marriage transactions and narratives that contextualise them. These forms of inherited and moral intentionality in narratives, and the rhetorics used by informants, can be seen through the *mahr* to be jostling and negotiating with the changing contexts of socio-economic politics and the personal contingencies of family reproduction. Narratives and rhetorics around past marriage offer a moral commentary on social change. In some of the examples I offer, they occur between mother and daughter as a form of reprimand and control. However, narratives also reflect and come up against the centrifugal and centripetal forces of a family situated in time, making, breaking, re-aligning and adjusting as new members are born, grow, join or separate through marriage and the uncertainties of mortality. Hence the inter-generational ambiguity, plurality and ‘heteroglossia’ contained within both marriage narratives and *mahr* practices are integral to the dynamism of marriage practices in Damascus. Narratives about the *mahr* reveal a sense of the passage of time (and sometimes perceived moral decay) across generations.

Marriage transactions over time, and narratives told about them, are practices of memorial and generative ‘work’ which are integral to the terms of marriage under discussion. By considering the inter-generational dynamics, I not only emphasise the realisation of cross-gender familial and conjugal relations, but also reveal the temporally-instrumental and memorialising quality of ‘work’ in which women partake. Work which is in some respects recompensed by the *mahr* or *mahr*-like prestations they receive from their spouses in recognition of a successful marriage.

Chapter 4

Food, Home & Time: Stored & Storied Tastes, Smells & Memories

'When I saw this kitchen I said yes... it doesn't have tiles or an oven but it's just like my grandmother's kitchen, I walked in and saw it and I loved it... it's a beit 'arabī and that is enough.'

Mawiyah's kitchen was a small windowless space with a low ceiling supported by rough wooden beams, different from the high ceilings in the other rooms of her little courtyard house (*beit 'arabī*). For Mawiyah, her memories often turned on narrating and annotating spaces like her kitchen, comparing it to past kitchens, remembering vividly the food she had prepared and consumed from these spaces, such as for the party she had organised for her parents' wedding anniversary. This extended to the rest of her home and its other spaces where she would excitedly reminisce about the courtyard of her maternal grandparent's *beit 'arabī*, planted with tomatoes, courgettes, aubergines and parsley around the edges, a lemon and a *naranj*¹ tree in the centre. She painted an image of an encircled but open space, bright with dappled sunlight, smelling of food and blossom that was tinted by the glow of security and productivity, which contrasted with her current impoverished state in a concrete, grey, crumbling house surrounded by taller modern apartment blocks and the pungent detritus of modern Damascus. As Bahloul (1996) notes of the reminiscences and memories of a historically conjoined community of Jewish and Muslim Algerians, now scattered:

¹ *Naranj* is the local bitter orange, related to the Seville variety. By Damascene accounts it is the original orange and the genitor of those Spanish oranges, brought by Damascenes to southern Spain with the expansion of the Muslim *Umayyad* empire from Damascus and the establishment of Andalusia. A *naranj* tree has very fragrant flowers (more perfumed than other citrus grown in Damascus), the fruit are a lumpy orange ovoid and have a thick (often 1cm) peel and pith that is preserved to make bitter sweets.

Time in domestic memory is made up of odours, images, and objects. It is materialised and closely associated with the concrete use of the household's space. (1996:104)

Bahloul's exploration of migrated and settled Setifian memoirs of a shared home offers a useful source for comparison with the experiences and expressions of recollection of my Damascene families. Her monograph highlights the importance of the labour and the work of 'use' in memorial accounts of the past. Places and persons are linked to the activities they held and enacted, as memories and as the means to memory. The labour and 'concrete acts' of the space form the memories which are recalled much later and invoked in material and sensual expressions such as the smell of food. In Bahloul's terms, in order to remember past kinship, 'one has to build, or rebuild' (1996:128).

In this chapter, I explore how memories of kinship and family life are held at the meeting point of sensorial and spatial experiences, unlocking personal and familial narratives, revealing a situated understanding of time passing and historical change. Within the regional literature, kinship is often interpreted as objectified through an architectural metaphor of the house (*beit* or *dār*), identified as broadly common in Mediterranean cultures (Herzfeld 1987:203-4). The house and household are often construed as the locus and representation of expanding and contracting agnatic, patronymic kinship association (Jean-Klein 2003:558). I consider the temporal terms and instrumental mechanisms taken by these 'house situated' forms of kinship sociality for my Damascene informants. In his influential work on the Kabyle house, Bourdieu (1977) stresses the importance of spatialised and sensual experience through symbolism and transmission. In doing so, he highlights the constant composition and recomposition that the experiencing of a domestic space entails, stressing reciprocity between place and practice. This draws attention to the inventions and social actions performed by those who 'inhabit' homes, rather than just occupying a fixed and established structure, which he links directly to the ongoing mutual constitution of spatial layout, sensual-cosmological symbolism and social forms. When considering memories, however, many of the spaces under discussion have gone, either under duress or because of pragmatic decisions through

changing circumstances. Instead of currently expressed spaces, they are held as forms of nostalgia and their memorial repetition is also a changing quality of experience. As nostalgia they contain a reciprocity between personal and social or collective memory. As Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes (2004) suggest, work that follows Halbwach's understanding of 'collective memory' offers 'an almost formal exegesis of memory as an art form, an aide to social cohesion and collective sentiment, and a base for social identity' (2004:9).

Throughout my material the sensorial and spatial are interlinked, however to understand how and why they are so linked it is useful to tease them apart and analyse each separately. Within this chapter, I start by emphasising the sensorial as linked to the creation and recalling of memories. In so doing I consider forms of remembering and memory-making that occur through practices of preparing and sharing food, which shows the sensual, the work and the effort. These practices are important exactly because they contain cross-gender practices for the labour and work of the family and household. Temporal qualities of food can be utilised to transcend spatial separations which threaten the closeness of kin and integrity of 'household'. I present wider forms of sociality, nostalgia and social memory expressed through accounts of homes which emphasise the nurturing quality of these imagined and experienced spaces. Different temporal-generational dispositions are contained by specific kin, via experience and expectation, not least because of changing domestic forms. Images of wider kin sociality and harmony illustrate why 'a house' is so emotively central to the hopes and aspirations of young Syrians and why it is a locus of their articulations of the future: an imagined and desired future.

The temporal-sensual inherent in processes of memory-making and remembering, homes, food and family, is a socially salient way in which multiple temporal-generational dispositions interact with one another. This shows how the distinctions between labour, work and action which Arendt ([1958] 1998) identifies can elide into one another. Commensal activities are one important example of multiple generations coming together for a particular type of plurality and verbal heteroglossia, where politically contentious topics of conversation occur.

Situated remembering & memory-making

Walking or riding by bus around the mountainside districts of Muhajareen and Rukn ad-deen, Mawiyah would become animated, pointing out the home her parents had owned and occupied until recently, recounting events that had occurred there to me: anchoring stories I had heard in other contexts in space and place. She would elaborate on the small monuments that marked her childhood such as her school ('We would walk to the school together arm in arm and play basketball after school') and favourite mosque ('it always felt so pure'), the shops that existed from her childhood ('I hated the stringy cheese from this shop, I thought it was hair! Now I know it's good!') and the places where homes of friends and family had once been, now either built-over or occupied by strangers.

The contextualised form of Mawiyah's recollections fleshes out a domestic memory which resonates with Connerton's (1989) discussion of 'embodied' or 'incorporated' practices as a major vehicle for the transmission of social memory, which can be distinguished from more explicit forms of 'commemorative' practices. Through his historical analysis of social memory, as both practice and process, Connerton argues that bodily practices are transmitted in and as traditions, or ritualised modes (1989:74). Thus the past can be encoded through social practices which are explicitly embodied, such as repetitively walking through a city space with important monuments or consuming food. Mawiyah's images and recollected knowledge of her past were sustained as much through performative and bodily memory while walking the streets of her life, as through the narrative remembrance and content of spoken recollection. During my time in Damascus, she and others would insist on remembering past events in a particular space or in a corresponding site to the memory. This extended to domestic events that I had shared with the narrator or rememberer, as if to better fix them in time and space. On one instance, as Mawiyah and I walked along the shopping area on the mountain of ash-Sheikh Mehia ad-deen, she persisted, 'Do you remember when we bought the camel meat from this shop and made kebabs? And he gave me the parsley for free for the *tubūlei* (parsley and bulgar wheat salad)? You haven't forgotten?' As we remembered

together, uniting in thought, the place of our past activity both reinforced the process and was implicated as an agent in this past event. Our micro-remembering illustrated why spatial images and imaginings play such an important role in ‘collective memory’. Although this relatively mundane shopping trip embodied the monotonous repetition of the necessary acts of concrete experience that Bahloul identifies as where the remembered past is lodged (1996:29), the shared experience, the relative novelty of camel meat (only occasionally consumed) and the generosity of the shopkeeper meant that this memory bridged the mundane with the specific and unusual.

About nine months after I had stopped living with Mawiyah in her little *beit ‘arabī*, she had to move as her landlord had increased the rent from 7,000 SYP a month to 11,000 SYP², an alarming hike of over 50% which represented a wider trend in rising accommodation prices across Damascus. She was unwilling to leave the area of Muhajareen, even though her family no longer lived there and most of her childhood friends, acquaintances and their families had long since moved out to Damascus’ sprawling suburbs, making each visit a long and expensive trek. Living in her new small basement apartment she mourned the loss of her little fragrant kitchen, despite the new one’s tiles, sighing, ‘It was my kitchen, this is just a kitchen’.

Mawiyah’s associations with the spaces and places she inhabited and had inhabited in her past were deeply personal, and as she narrated them to me she ornamented them with the complex events and flow of her life-story, in part described throughout this thesis. I came to see these place-related memories as a personal attempt to resist the deracination that had occurred, was still occurring in her life and those she was close to. Her expressiveness offered me a way to frame questions towards my informants, especially older women, about their personal life stories and reminiscences. Broad enquiries about family and the past would often leave people confused or stating, ‘My life was normal, my family were normal’, prising apart any intimacy and closeness that had developed when I explained ‘but I don’t know what normal is for Damascus, please tell me’. Friendly faces became

² At this time, early January 2009, these amounts corresponded approximately to a rise from 100GBP to 160GBP per month while Mawiyah’s income from private teaching, contributions towards her two sons upkeep from their father and an intermittent lodger she had taken on after I had left did not exceed the equivalent of 110GBP.

remote and eyes glazed over. I found I had to learn and develop a lexicon of remembering and the context of remembering before I could access the memories of my informants, a ‘Catch-22’ that only the experience of living with Mawiyah and her quotidian remembrances allowed me to circumnavigate.

Asking people about the homes and spaces they grew up in elicited detailed descriptions, often placing their family’s past in time and space. Moreover, as with Mawiyah, it was the perceptual and sensory presence of places and spaces that inspired my Damascene informants, especially but not exclusively women, to discuss their memories. Just as the spatial contexts of remembering were specific, so too were the type of memories elicited which emphasised relationships between people as spatially and temporally constituted. Contained within the very process of remembering was the process of affirming relationships, tracing or sometimes cutting social networks and also generating or re-generating relationships with those involved in the remembering process or audience of it. As seen with Shams and the *kiba* in the previous chapter, actions such as preparing or eating food, using certain items of household furniture or teaching/learning a domestic task also inspired people to elaborate on the past on both general and personal levels. Indeed, women were often unwilling to tell me about how they went about making some food or dish unless they were buying its ingredients or making it in a domestic setting, making the dish greater than the sum of its edible ingredients. Thus the learning, teaching and experiencing of these things were always situated in very specific spaces, making these acts explicitly those of repetition and embodied memory.

Saqīfa: material and aromatic culture as memory

‘Smell that!’ Hala twitched her nose and sniffed the air in an exaggerated manner to encourage me to partake in the experience that was contributing to the beatific smile on her face. I complied and breathed in heavily to share the scent: *cinnamon, cardamon, sumac, olive oil, camomile, thyme and salty, earthy, fizzy fermentation*. Hala was pointing out what she considered the centre or heart (*qelb*) of the Damascene home, in this instance a small store cupboard that was set into the wall of the kitchen from the floor to ceiling. Known as a *saqīfa* (plural *siqueefat*), which I will

translate as larder (although it rarely contained preserved or hung meats), it had a perforated zinc mesh door that was layered with paint giving an organic appearance like a mesh of vines. Through the mesh came the milieu of aromatic odours like a complex perfume. Peeking through the holes I could make out the jewels of preserved food in pots and large glass jars, waiting as if the winter in Damascus would be a long stretch of arctic bareness. ‘Of course this is just a small *saqīfa*,’ Hala clarified, ‘I’ll show you a real one when we go to Granny (*Ṭeta (colloq.)*) and Granddad (*Jed (colloq.)*)’. I was not to be disappointed; on our next trip to her grandparents, after the initial greetings and formalities I was whisked off to see the larger, more quintessential *saqīfa* (*pl. saqīfāt, colloq.*). Rather than being set in the wall, this store room acted as an internal loft within the kitchen: a mezzanine over two-thirds of the kitchen with a small door and ladder to enter it from the kitchen and another larger door that could be accessed from the apartment staircase. Such a practical design, which maintained the food storage areas at constant temperature in the changing extremes of a Syrian climate, could only be incorporated in the high-ceilinged apartments and *beit ‘arabī*. It gave the kitchen space a distinct feel and sense of use in contrast to the other rooms of such homes. Whereas these might have high airy ceilings to militate against the hot summer weather, the kitchen working space with its lowered/divided ceiling was often very enclosed. In such layouts, the *saqīfa* was as much part of the kitchen as the food preparation area. During my visits, it was common for older women to clamber laboriously up the ladder to show me and pass down the precious contents of their larder.

I use the term ‘precious’ to describe the *saqīfa*’s contents very deliberately. When taken to see the *saqīfa*, I had the impression that I was being allowed into a very intimate space. This intimacy was emphasised by the manner in which material foodstuff apparently compensated for the lack of (or limited) family photographs on display. Bottles and jars contained their own narratives and memories for my informants, pertaining to specific family members or relationships, and I would suggest contained facets of personification through these associations. These objects were personified by the labour and work which had gone into their creation, a work which then pervaded the living space of the kitchen with its fragrant smell that Hala was so keen that I experience. In the dark cubby of the *saqīfa*, old women would

lower their voices and often tell me a fragment from their personal past. In this space, one woman detailed the memories she held of the death of a small child. Another elderly woman who had been reticent to offer her life-story, recalled the time their father carried her, holding her against his chest within his woollen coat, wrapped around to shelter them both from the snow. She remembered the smell of olive soap and the texture of the wool. In this context my informants often took great care to explain when and how they had learned to prepare the food that seemed to watch us from its shelves. This was a primary source for details about their own natal kin, such as long-dead parents and grandparents via the medium of learned recipes and household management. These reminiscences, especially about childhood and their life before marriage, were rarely forthcoming in other settings as older women often shied away from discussing their personal biographies, preferring instead to discuss the lives of their children or facets of their married experiences. The dark enclosure of these larger larders contained a kernel of privacy and was treated with such reverence that I could see why Hala regarded it as the heart of the home.

The *saqīfa* in some form was present in all the kitchens I visited, from a couple of enclosed shelves or a small chest in poorer households to more elaborate layers of small rooms and cupboards in grander apartments and *beit ‘arabī*. What they all shared was a mesh or outlet of some kind through which the smells could disseminate into the kitchen and beyond. At least from an aromatic perspective, the *saqīfa* was indeed the heart of the contemporary Damascene home regardless of its age. The olfactory perception associated with the *saqīfa* and the responses it elicited are one way of accessing how history-making, as in the construction of a narrativised and reckoned-with past, actually proceeds before and beyond words or conversation (Robertson in press).

The *saqīfa* was repetitively shown to me in order that I might admire the produce, effort and smells stored there, suggesting that for Damascenes in addition to Hala this sensual experience was an important locus of what home is, what kinship is about and how these things are remembered. Fortunately for me, many of my informants were happy to wax lyrical about the smells and tastes that punctuate their lives. By so doing, they helped to show me how the senses are integral to understanding material culture as saturated with historical perception, as in ‘time’

(Seremetakis 1994; 1996). Yet what this does not address is how much memory and history become explicitly and intentionally codified within the very fabric of the design and experience of material life in the Damascene context.

By experiencing the *saqīfa* and what it represented in my informants' homes, my own sensory and perceptual dispositions were re-contextualised. The semantics of the space and the larder were not totally unknown to me, having spent some of my childhood in a Victorian terrace house with a small kitchen and larder deposited at the back of the house affording the advantages of efficiency, everything close at hand, as well as the limitations of being distinct from the rest of the home and lacking the sociality of being able to eat or easily relax in the small space (Attfield 2000:77). The historical class/gender elements of Euro-American forms of architectural and spatial manipulation of relegating the 'hearth' and food preparation area from the centre to the periphery of the house have been explored in detail (Hayden 1982; Holdsworth 1988). Despite these recognisable elements of entering and using a Syrian kitchen it was as if experiencing such familiar things in a dream. Aesthetics were shared in architecture and family practice; however their details and articulation could be disarmingly incongruous. This overlap and contrast viscerally underscores how the specifics of domestic materiality go beyond the mundane and forgettable. Moreover, it is a reminder that the Middle Eastern and Damascene home is charting a course on a trajectory distinct from those familiar to me in the UK, with a design history and intention which reflects specific periods in Syrian social history. Thus, echoing Seremetakis' questions about the transformation of and transformative quality of the senses, I next ask how the past was experienced and thought of on the level of the domestic. Additionally, to what extent were my informants' experiences of and capacities to narrate history linked to sensual configurations of home and family?

Pickles: the time of preserving

Returning to Mawiyah and our ambling shopping trip of remembrance along ash-Sheikh Mehia ad-deen, we were in search of perfect aubergines to make a preserve called *makdūs* (*colloq.*). At every vegetable vendor we stopped and held small egg-

sized aubergines in the palms of our hands, Mawiyah showing me how to check their firm but slightly yielding shiny bodies and rough green stalks, enquiring as to their origins. When finally she had found the right ones, and purchased fresh shelled walnuts and sweet mild chilli peppers, we returned to her fragrant kitchen to begin the long process of preparing *makdūs*. The procedure is precise and time-consuming, first requiring the small aubergines to be hollowed out to leave a shell about 8mm thick, which could then be squashed without breaking and left for ten days in a coarse salt. These are then carefully washed and preserved in water for three days, changing the water several times and next stuffed with the walnut and mild chilli mix, very gently cooked over the course of a day, left to dry for a another day and lastly preserved in the best quality olive oil available until this is stained red by the chilli, not to be eaten for another month. Clearly such a process requires skill and planning. For Mawiyah and my other informants, this type of food preservation required a continual focus of activity and personal time around the task, thus demonstrating the managerial qualities necessary to accomplish the prized end product.



Pickling time – labour becomes work

Within each *saqīfa* I visited, there was always at least one proud bottle of *makdūs* snuggling on the shelves alongside an array of *makhallel* (pickled vegetables such as turnip, beetroot, chilli and cauliflower) and home treated olives. To create this horde of preserved foods, the same level of carefully-timed labour was required as the *makdūs*; olives for example needed daily rinsing and water changing for at least a month to achieve a prized mellowness which could not be purchased in the shops. These preserving processes were often elaborately explained to me over meals where they were served and eaten. But before such detailed elucidation I was asked to guess the process that was required, the time it took, the effort that was required and who exactly had performed the individual steps. I learned to strike a balance between knowledge and ignorance, relating some simpler recipes or the rudiments of food production while leaving space for the details of recipes to be filled, imbuing an intimacy by my understanding ('Bravo! By God you know about things *Arabi!*'), but still allowing me to be taught, shown and surprised by a process that was held with such pride. It is notable that these stores of aromatic preserved foods were not purely a nest of 'women's work'. Many of the items in these spaces that fragrancd the kitchen were the produce of men and male contributions to food preparation. Indeed husbands were as keen to show off their handiwork in the kitchen as their wives, often proudly extolling the virtues of their combined conjugal effort to manage this important stock. This cross-gendered activity emphasises that it is an important facet of domestic and kinship sociality and that it infers prestige.

The aforementioned temporal and spatial situation of learned skills was strikingly common when my informants talked about their pickles and preserves. As we shopped and began the process of making *makdūs*, Mawiyah explained to me how she had learnt this process from her maternal grandmother, linking back to her grandparents' abundant courtyard where they would grow the small aubergines by hand that then became the *makdūs*. It was as if the courtyard in this remembered house was as much of a generating factor as the family who peopled it. The very time embodied in the creation of these preserved foods emphasises a point: here labour contains within it the transformative and lasting ability to be 'work' in Arendt's sense of the term, having memorialising capacities which extend beyond subsistence



Pickles and preserves: Despite being plentiful to buy a strong preference for home-preserved savoury edibles was apparent.

([1958] 1998:7-8). In this context I mean that although the eventual aim of the labour of making such food was to consume it, and therefore in some respects the material objects were themselves ‘disposable’, the act of storage even for relatively short periods had the effect of concretising the labour in a very particular and important way. This is underscored by the way that it was possible to buy the high quality fresh vegetables that were used for pickles in markets and shops across the city almost every day of the year. Indeed shopping for vegetables and fruit took up a lot of time in the domestic up-keep and management of the home. As mother-of-five Buthaina explained to me, ‘Once the children are at school I spend at least two hours every (week) day shopping for food in the market and I still have to phone Bassam to bring things like cheese and the best salad from near his work’, which illustrates the labour individual women and wider kin put into purchasing food. This effort was then magnified by the near-universal strong preference shown by my informants for homemade preserves and pickled foods over shop-bought or, with the exception of

the tomatoes and parsley used to make *tubūlei*, over fresh vegetables. This, I would stress, has much to do with value ascribed to the taste of pickled and preserved produce over fresh or shop-bought food, which also co-implicates the labour and time involved in preservation.

Damascene and Syrian cuisine and eating practices are quite varied, and constitute an important realm of care, pride and consideration. Although exceptions did exist, much of the food eaten at home or regarded as Syrian was distinguished as salty/savoury (*milḥ*) or sweet (*ḥelwa*). The former were generally strongly savoury, with a salty, sharp and dry taste often particularly prized, while sweet dishes or drinks were very sugary. Damascenes would comment on the confusing nature of foreign food, including those from other Middle Eastern countries and European foods, which mixed salty/sharp with sugary. Pickles were very salty and often sour, consequently along with certain meat dishes they were regarded by my informants as the savoury food *par excellence*. This sense of taste was made by and reminded those consuming them of the effort, time and personification imbued in these products.

Here the nature of class in relation to labour and employment for my informants must briefly be spelled out. Although there is a long and proud tradition of craftwork and production in Damascus, with the specialised *sūqs* on the edge of the Old City displaying both production and retail of such objects, most people did not get to make or use objects of their own creation with the exception of the food they prepared. This is important because various simultaneous narratives and rhetorics of Damascene practice come into play. Firstly, the elite of the city historically not only eschewed but in some respects denigrated ‘work with hands’; not engaging in mundane tasks has connotations of prestige and wealth, consequently scorn towards such activity had contemporary currency. For men, mercantilism often dominated discussions about the sorts of work which were idealised. Trading was, for many understandable reasons, considered more prestigious than production. These claims are broadly borne out historically as Aleppo, rather than Damascus, was Syria’s primary production capital (Quateart 1991), with much Damascene industry such as the glassworks initiated by the state since the 1970s. Similarly, for wealthy women rhetoric of being served dominates aspirations of how a ‘proper Damascene wife’ should be treated. This was used to explain to me why Damascene

women did not sew their own trousseaux, as was common in the Syrian villages. Meanwhile, poor women would stress to me how they might have to make clothes for themselves but always ensured their children and husband were seen in off-the-peg, bought clothes.

To have the income to buy things was far more of a status marker than the ability to make things. However, a strong seam of counter-narrative among my informants buffeted this emphasis on the aloof urbanite, not least because of the economic stratification evident in the city. Many people had to perform manual labour or factory work, male and female, regardless of how they defined themselves in relation to it. In addition, many families living in Damascus were ‘immigrant’ from the rest of Syria or the region and modelled alternative status differentiators from the classic image of Damascene refinement. Regardless of their originating background, the middle- and lower-class families I spent time with were often keen to discuss and show off the ‘cleverness’ of their family members as evidenced by the material objects they had made. In this way, a dominant attitude which denigrated labour was countered by alternative outlooks which actively valued certain types of material evidence of effort and labour. I would suggest food, together with the commensality it created, was a primary example of celebrated work along with the successful production of children and marriages.

Within the home, the work of food preparation and especially preservation was continually and repetitively being restated: by the lasting smell it created, that permeated out from the *saqīfa* into the kitchen, and most importantly by the eating of this produce. This demonstrates how important the senses, in this case smell and taste, were for memory and knowing in this domestic and kinship setting: ‘memory’, as in remembering the work of maintaining kin through sustenance and the conviviality that can be created; ‘knowing’ as in the knowledge of these processes and what they help to maintain. The processes and acts of remembering and knowing a space is home and particular people are family, blend together.

Bahloul (1996) convincingly argues that the process of making and then recalling in a state of deracination the celebration meal of *t’fina* in Setif is a representation of a particular type of time in an edible form: ‘Its flavour and thick consistency are presented as the gustatory representation of Sabbath time in

abeyance' (1996:105). The act of making such a dish and the nourishment it creates encapsulates the effort and the time of its creation. According to Bahloul, it not only holds time in abeyance, 'it reverses time' (1996:105). Moreover, when it is recalled at a later, spatially-severed time its potency is then re-enacted and reinforced: 'The remembered time of the ritual fuses the private and the public' (1996:110). In concord with Seremetakis' question 'What is fermentation if not history?' (1996:3), what is preservation of food if not 'the maturation that takes place through the articulation of time and substance?' I would suggest that for my informants, the 'substance' Seremetakis refers to can be seen as the food ingredients *and* the human endeavour of work, transmission and memory that are transformed by the time taken to preserve these foods. The 'articulation' of time and substance, their conceptual relationship or point of interaction, then seems to be one of a particular set of smells which elude easy transcription to words. For my informants, food may not have the ability to 'reverse time' as Bahloul suggests is possible for the (ex-) residents of Dar-Refayil, but it can hold time and give or rather transmit the important temporal aspects of kinship sociality.

The taste of home & being close

Nada and her teenage daughters had been staying at Nada's parents' house for a few days, in order to help Umm Mamoun with the housework and prepare food for the imminent arrival of relatives who now lived in Jordan. The daughters ran errands, making coffee, preparing snacks and fetching their younger sibling from school. Nada's husband prepared a lunch which we ate on a table the girls had folded out. 'You love us as much as you eat!' they exhorted repetitively, insisting I eat copious olives which Umm Mamoun had carefully treated and matured. In this way, each food was introduced with its own self-generating experience and memory. My eating of these hand-sweetened black olives was not enough; my hosts needed to be sure I was experiencing them correctly and that I was part of the reciprocity of senses their oily black flesh contained, by knowing their provenance and the process or work it took to get them to the table and my mouth. Here familiarisation worked on many levels: as I ate 'sweet' olives and drank sweet tea I too became sweeter, literally

through the food and figuratively in my hosts' moral perception (Cowan 1990). This logic of affective transfer of qualities appeared to extend to the coffee served for guests visiting a home more generally. Jokes would be made about the correlation between more sugary coffee and the sweetness of hosts' and guests' temperaments alike, thus emphasising that food's taste, often made by the work that goes into it, is integral to its role in nurturing appropriate relationships.



'You love us as much as you eat!' A Syrian Breakfast.

Although positive attributes pertained to sweetness, the logic of transfer was not also oppositional: eating salty/sour food did not have negative connotations but simply imparted a different set of qualities. If anything, for my informants sweet foods were more mediatory between a family and others precisely because they were *less* likely to be invested with effort and labour. Sweet food such as ice-cream or baklava were more commonly purchased pre-made outside the home and accepted as a gift from non-kin, contrasting with savoury food which often contained a more complex association of familial unity and exclusivity. Many of my informants

primarily ate food produced from within the family. Although when needed they purchased snacks or might occasionally eat at a restaurant, they often found the thought of food produced by another family ‘disgusting’ or even insulting. Among the families with whom I did research, savoury food produced by non-kin or even kin who were not especially close was often foisted upon them as gift which they regarded with disdain. Women and men rhetorically questioned why they had been given such food, asking derisively, ‘Do they think I/we can’t make it ourselves?’ and offered it for me to take home.

The juxtaposition between disgust at savoury food produced by others and the processes of nurturing appropriate relationships through (repetitive) experiencing and memory-making in a contextualised manner, speaks to the tension within Damascene and Middle Eastern kinship between being related/family (*‘aīla/ usra*) and being close (*qarīb*) (Rugh 1997). This distinction is often one between ‘associates’ or ‘affiliates’ of a given household and the wider formally-reckoned members of an agnatic kin association (Jean-Klein 2003:560). In many instances this is the same thing: you live, socialise and work with relatives, and therefore through time and repetitive remembering you are close and you are kin. The two mutually support each other. This is reflected in Damascus by the way *qarīb* is the most common form of expressing that someone is a relation, often emphasised by the manner of expressing a close relative, in colloquial Damascene, which doubly stresses closeness. However, with processes of deracination and migration, this interweaving can become unthreaded, making relatives less ‘close’ in space, time and shared experience and memory-making than they might expect or desire. Therefore when the wider family of Abu and Umm Mamoun arrived having travelled from Amman, Homs and the outskirts of Damascus, it was essential that the correct meal be provided to buttress that closeness-through-experience. Under the instruction of Abu and Umm Mamoun, Nada and her husband prepared a large dish of *karawyā* (*colloq.*) which they described as a special ‘sweet soup’ made from ground caraway, ground rice and sugar, each bowl carefully topped with desiccated coconut, pistachios and blanched almonds by their youngest daughter and niece. Abu Mamoun explained to me, ‘This is the food we would give them all as children, so this is the food we give them now to make them grow’. Then he surprised me by



Cousins sharing taste, smell and family work

domestic rituals of food sharing. A special food and memory (as this food is repeated) can operate in tandem and proceed to erase space by bridging time symbolically and gathering specific generations of relatives in the same discursive event. As Bahloul puts it: ‘Memory inscribed in ritual affects the reunion of the members of the extended family, the living and the dead, against and beyond history’ (1996:104). There are particular qualities in sharing food which through its nurturing capacity, reinforce memory creation and remembering, to make it a central component of kinship.

adding, ‘These are my favourite sons’, casting his hand around the room, ‘my nephew, the husband of Nada, and my daughter’s husbands... they have given me my granddaughters, you enjoy your grandchildren more than your own’. Here it seemed he was alluding to several layers of closeness, which meant that he could include his nephews/sons-in-law as his sons through their children and the commensality they shared.

A generative dimension springs from the combination of kin and closeness created by these

Creating closeness over distance

Not everyone who lived away was lucky enough to travel home regularly and share childhood favourites like *karawyā*. An illustration of food’s potency to traverse space

and time can be seen in the way that transporting home-preserved foods attempted to mitigate processes of deracination by extending commensality. Syrians seemed to be continually lugging large bags, jars, cans and barrels of preserved foodstuffs elsewhere. On one journey to collect my younger brother from Istanbul, I shared my bus journey from Damascus to Istanbul with a selection of edible luggage. At one bus change in Antakya (Hatay) in the south of Turkey, surrounded by large bottles of olives (about one gallon or 4-5 litres) and industrial margarine tubs now filled with pickles, I plucked up the courage to ask their diminutive chaperone who they were from and who they were for, did she have plans to sell them? 'No!' she scoffed, 'it's for my family, everything is so expensive in Istanbul, Syrian things are much cheaper. Besides I couldn't go without a present. Maybe they will sell it, that's not my business... as they like'. I replied that I hoped she had some strong relatives to meet her in Istanbul! 'Of course', she laughed, 'I am visiting my son and some of my nephews are there too, they're very strong because I fed them!' The equation was clear; the economic, sensual and affective sides of nurturing were elided. The preservation of food helps to preserve kin-ties that cannot be experienced 'everyday' through spatial closeness, by animating a sensual regime of taste, origins, memory and kin-work (Sutton 2001:75). In other words, the articulation of the everyday from past to present, expressed by its memory-generating capacity, exists across space as well as time.

Reflexively, kin and especially children responded to attempts to bridge spatial divides by pining for their mothers' and sometimes fathers' or grandparents' food when it was unavailable. Several months after Aamal had succeeded in fulfilling her immediate aspiration to work in the Emirates and was living/working in Qatar, she told me over an internet chat, 'You know, I miss my mum's food soooo much. During Ramadan and *Īd* I was crying constantly, I missed her food all the time. Did she cook for you? Did your husband eat her food?' She seemed pleased to hear we had enjoyed her mother's hospitality. In response Mawiyah tried to send her several kilos of homemade *makdūs* via a friend: the weight was too much for air luggage and eventually it had to be sent across land. Aamal evidently valued the cooking and food of her mother and relatives, hence her forlorn longing at Ramadan. It was over the manner of food preparation that she and Mawiyah were most aligned

and least likely to quarrel. When I brought home recipes from other families, or friends of Mawiyah's would drop off food they had made, both mother and daughter would enjoy explaining to me where their recipe was superior. In the realm of food production and consumption, children aligned with their families and by so doing emphasised division between kin and non-kin.

Yasmin & Naranj: smells like kin spirit?

If the sensual dimension of kinship sociality is so important, then we must take seriously the emphasis that Damascenes place on the smells of the past in their recollections of their childhoods and accounts of perceived change. When I directly asked my informants specific questions about their memories such as 'Who were you close to when you were a child? Who did you play with? Which family members did you spend the most time with?' rarely was I rewarded with a direct response, despite these topics coming up indirectly in longer narratives and conversations. Instead, the response I would receive is typified by this sixty-year-old mechanic, Abu Marwan:

In the past the thing that was special in Damascus was the scent, you know the scent of yasmin. It was so beautiful, lots of trees and lots of water and lots of flowers. I lived in my Grandfather's house in Salihiyye and we were good and happy, we lived in a beit 'arabī so there was family always visiting, and my mother cooked beautiful food.

Smell acted as the signifier for a chain of relationships that include the house/home and a portrait of a 'generic sociality', that could sometimes smooth over the more specific relationships in Damascene kinship that have emerged in earlier discussions within this thesis. Such distancing from the very specific sets of kin relationships, often conveyed when Damascene's were narrating and practicing family activity, might be seen as statements of temporal remoteness: the time elapsed and the process of memory/remembering make fuzzy the lines of explicit cross-subjectivity. However, other areas of this lived domestic and kin sociality were highly detailed in

descriptions. Here the spatial dynamics of living were as important as the sensorial and I will attempt to paint a portrait of Damascene homes and houses that includes narrative reminiscences and ethnographic experience. Working on the *mahr* sensitised me to nostalgic rhetorics as an affective form of socialisation; accordingly, expressiveness about the beauty of the past centred on the Damascene house cannot be ignored, as it acted as an important source and filter of contemporary modes and aspirations of living.

A Damascene *beit 'arabī* is usually a series of rooms which surround a central courtyard in the classic style of an Arabic abode (Keenan 2000). Mawiyah's house was modest, but because it had a small courtyard from which the living spaces of the house radiated on two sides it counted as a *beit 'arabī*. It comprised only one living/sleeping room, a storeroom, a kitchen and boiler-room, a corridor space that I colonised and a derelict upstairs room inhabited by feral cats. Larger Damascene *beit 'arabī* are reflected by this description given by a retired Syrian Army-Major of his childhood home in Amouna and the variations in other homes:

First there is an entrance passage that conceals the central courtyard from the street (diḥliz (colloq.)). Sometimes living rooms (am-majlīs (colloq.)) have a separate entrance or even in larger homes a whole separate courtyard, with a second courtyard offering a private space (al- ḥaramlik). We didn't have that but the kitchen and women's rooms were at the back and hard to see when you entered, the stairs were concealed so the women could not be surprised by guests. In the courtyard a stone or inlaid marble fountain marks the centre and one wall is open in a liwan, a semi-open reception space for summer. You always know which way you are facing in a beit 'arabī because the liwan [an open-walled summer living room within the courtyard] always faces north for coolness, however small it is. The whole domestic space is designed for the changes in the seasons, with the ground floor designed as a cool space for summer, with a high ceiling and hard marble or limestone floors. Rooms like the main

reception room (qa'a (colloq.)) sometimes even include internal fountains to cool and humidify the air in the long hot summer. Upper stories are often a mirror of the arrangement below, but with lower ceilings and warmly insulated with wooden panelling and carpets to offer comfort in the winter. I remember we had a wood stove and everyone would just move upstairs for winter.

This description sets out the architectural bones of a house, designed for the variation in Damascene climate from icy winter to summer sirocco and in order to protect gendered privacy. Following Bourdieu's (1977) approach to the Kabyle house, this domestic space can be analysed as both a practical living space and as a social and cosmological classifier that is able to combine dimensions of space and time. The design of the home contains the ability to protect women from the gaze of strangers whilst simultaneously allowing them to complete the tasks of the home. Spatial layouts also allowed strangers controlled access, with multiple reception rooms being the ideal. From these alignments, it appears that correct hospitality seemingly played as important a role as protecting women. After outlining the bones the Army-Major continued to flesh out his memory:

Our home was simple. It had a big courtyard but not much decoration, just simple black and white stripes ('ablaq (colloq.)), black basalt from Bosra and white stone from Damascus and there was some pastework³ above the door to the reception room. Nothing like beit Nizzam or beit Jabri⁴! There were just lots of flowers in pots. Sweet basil for the Prophet, damask rose and caged canaries singing... One time my older brothers and I tried to take a smoking pipe ('argīla (colloq.)) from the reception room. You went in and there was the threshold ('ataba (colloq.)) to take off your shoes and go up to the sitting area (divan (colloq.)), in

³ Where geometric designs are carved out of the stone, usually the limestone plinths around doors and windows, and then filled with a ground paste of other differently-coloured or dyed stone, which is then set with lime to create a colourful flat surface.

⁴ Famous examples of Damascene great houses that are now open to the public or run as now restaurants.

our house there was one saqīfa below the reception room in a cellar and stairs to go down. Above the stairs was a niche (muṣab (colloq.)) where the smoking pipe was kept. My brother Mustafa wanted to try the smoking pipe so we climbed up to get it, but we were unstable and above the cellar stairs, we wobbled once, we wobbled more and we fell! My brother Mustafa snatched at the stalactite design on the niche ('muqānus (colloq.)). He held it for one moment, two moments, three moments, and then... it was broken and he fell with a scream. Our mother came and found us. She made us stand all day outside in the courtyard in a line until my father came home for lunch. 'Who did this?' but we never told him, by God we were naughty. That lunch, my mother had cooked my father's favourite stuffed courgette in yoghurt sauce... we could smell it but we had to go to bed hungry. I cried with hunger, I wanted the food so much! My mother told us that the big snake (alfiyya (colloq.), the one of a thousand years) that we could hear breathing at night in the walls might come out of its nest and poison our food for our mischief! My maternal grandmother was living with us then and she cuddled us and put out some milk to appease the big snake in the wall.

Here the Major adds details of the material aesthetics of the house, its beauty and sensory qualities. He offers an example of childhood 'naughtiness' that damaged the house leading not only to his mother's lovely lunch being withheld, but also to a threat from the very house itself via its resident protective snake that breathed in the walls. This guardian snake is a common motif in discussions and myths around the 'traditional' Damascene house⁵ and suggests that the house itself is in some respects a moral and knowing entity, being a constituent part of the relationships it holds.

⁵ This notion of a 'protective' or 'guardian' snake in some way living in or about the house can be found also in Bourdieu's description and analysis of the Kabyle House. Here, however, there are more explicit sexual overtones in relation to female fertility practices within the house and generation. Bourdieu identifies its presence on domestic items in the region as 'the symbol of the fertilising power of man and the symbol of death followed by resurrection' (1977:134), but does not mention whether it contains a moral aspect within the running and cosmology of the house.

This echoes Balchard's assertion that the past Damascene 'house is imagined as a concentrated being' (1969:17). Finally, the Major concluded his narrative by contextualising it:

Most of the time though we played in the ḥāra with the other children... it didn't matter what we broke there, in the ḥāra we were medium (referring to wealth)... that was the best thing about the old way of living in my opinion, it was always mixed. My father was an orphan so there was no very close family. Instead we played poorer and richer, Muslims, Christians, Palestinian, Armenian, it made no difference, children running in and out of all the houses.

Here the sociality and relationships remembered run beyond the family to the neighbourhood, and to some extent articulate a positive and nostalgic image of a Damascus of the past where boundaries between groups such as wealth, religion and ethnic background were at least permeable. This image of social harmony among diverse groups is in line with a broader rhetoric of Syrian Ba'athism (Batatu 1981, Hinnebusch 1991), to which, as someone with rank in the Syrian army, the Major must have subscribed in some part during his career.

The Major's is, however, a child's eye view of life in such a house. Many of my informants similarly had memories of life as a child in such a house, having lived in apartment blocks for all of their adult lives. Hajji, whose marriage narrative was discussed in Chapter 3, painted a different image of her life as a daughter-in-law, wife and mother living in such a courtyard house. Her memories were also nostalgic for the aesthetic of the space but tempered by pragmatic concerns of the labour involved in the housework and the negotiations required to ease tensions between her and her family-in-law. Hence, all memories of domestic life and time in these types of houses created a spatial image whose shape was defined by the social structures and relations of the resident group. Once activated by the memories of scent, food and texture, narratives of recollection often retrieved what functioned as a hierarchical system of relationships, exchanges and obligations.

The transformation and transition of Middle Eastern domestic architecture from *beit 'arabī* courtyard-radial residences to apartments is well documented (Kabbani 1989; Bahloul 1996; Khater 2001; Salamandra 2004), though such accounts tend to focus on the wealthier strata that dominate Damascene accounts of itself and its social life. Many Damascene authors from elite (and sometimes middle-class) backgrounds nostalgically lament the loss of their courtyard homes, which encompasses essentialised sets of kin-based sociality. A spatial overview of both grander *beit 'arabī* and humbler courtyard homes shared by several affinal kin units, emphasises a particular regime that juggles family and female privacy with an emphasis on appropriate penetration by guests and hospitality. Thus in existing layouts and remembered accounts, women could move about the spaces in such a way that they would not easily be surprised by a guest. Appropriate hospitality called for the appropriate access of strangers, with the ideal being multiple reception spaces. These ideals are accompanied in accounts by the seasonality of domestic tasks and spatial use, with families occupying warmer spaces in the winter and cooler spaces in the summer, thus describing a fluidity of space, function and family life.

Nostalgic reminiscences permeated my interviews/conversations and the literature on Damascus and the Damascene courtyard house as a social trope. The aesthetics reciprocally support a memory of a material and social world lost but not forgotten. For example, autobiographical work such as Tergeman's 'Daughter of Damascus' ([1978] 1994) or Ibilbi's semi-fictional works 'Sabriya: Damascus Bitter Sweet' (1997) and 'Grandfather's Tale' (1998) portray Damascus as layers of an onion, from the inner layers of childhood remembrances of home moving to the outer layers of the city. Child, home, city are all conceived as actors and acted upon, and conveyed through the memory of the senses in an emotive manner. As Tergeman wrote in the late 1970s, it is the Damascene courtyard house that inflames and colours memories:

'Our house... no matter how much older I become, I am still homesick for our house... our spacious old Arabic home... and homesick for those things that still sleep and wake up in its courtyard: lemons, *kabada*, *naranj*, grape vines, figs and tall jasmine climbers which drop

blossoms like snow. You will find a central fountain there where water splashes from the Barada and Fija springs and water melon and jasmine flowers float in its pool.’ (Tergeman 1994:16).

Here as with many accounts, the house with its courtyard and fountain is the centre of a network that feeds it, and it then generates the people who occupy its space so that it colonises their memory, engulfing them and completing their senses of self. The manner of expression of such nostalgic recollections and placement of the self in these spaces, attempts to cancel out the passing of time and social change that underlie the creation of memory and the past. It is as if by speaking in the present tense (‘you will find’) the narrator wishes to locate the past in eternity ‘to give it a dimension of the absolute’ (Bahloul 1996:102). Among poorer Damascenes, nostalgia contained in such narration of past places and the events that had occurred in them became a verbal, if not physical, family reunion. Like Mawiyah’s accounts of family celebrations, these narratives of an absolute past were often punctuated by specific ritual landmarks of reminiscence. Ultimately it is the density of relationships remembered and the way that time in domestic memory is woven into the structure of genealogical history which marks these remembered houses as ‘the architecture of memory’ (Bahloul 1996). While the material luxury of grand Damascene courtyard houses was never part of their families’ histories or self-accounts, this architecture of memory was shared by those of lower-middle class and poor backgrounds.

The romance and mystique that surrounded the house was also a central part of the lived experience of the city, which lays claim to be the oldest inhabited city in the world⁶. Within Damascus, myths of the city pile up and overlap. As we walked from Abu Nour in Rukn ad-deen to Sheikh Mehi ad-deen, Mawiyah sadly told me, her youngest son Mustafa and her niece Ama, how a river ran below our feet and her grandfather had remembered when it was a babbling stream, open to the elements and surrounded by green. From this she slid into a history of Sheikh Mehia ad-deen, a Sufi poet and philosopher who died in 638 *hijrī* (approximately AD1240 Gregorian) and who had settled in this area after determining that it had the freshest air, by hanging up meat in various locations and seeing where decomposition was slowest. The children seemed excited by this and suggested we repeat the experiment

⁶ Damascus’s competitors for this title include Aleppo and Baghdad.

to discover the location of the freshest air in contemporary Damascus. Good-humouredly batting away the suggestion as expensive, Mawiyah moved on to the Arabic (Semitic) name of Damascus and the cave higher up on the side of Mount Qassioun, which we could just spy through the concrete homes and power lines. Here, in Muslim understanding, Cain killed Abel, the Arabic name *Dimashq* broken down to *dam* (blood) *shaqqa* (crack). At this story, though, she faltered, having seen on TV that this had happened in Palestine not here in Damascus; her loyalties seemed slightly stretched by these competing possibilities and she phlegmatically ended, 'I don't know, only God knows'. The ghosts of a beautiful past contained within the 'paradise' that was Damascus seemed sometimes to mock those who trod its streets and remembered its past glories directly or through reminiscences passed between generations. Juxtaposition between the 'reality' and 'fantasy' highlights how Damascus is still beautiful for its inhabitants but not the 'same' as it was in the nostalgic past.

Other forms of loss inhabited memories and contexts of domestic social change which enforced contrasts between then and now. The confiscation of property was often alluded to by my wealthier informants, although very rarely directly and as with socialist Poland, 'memory was often located and reproduced in disguised form, through rituals hidden under the cloak of the house, kinship, or friendship, through family kitchen table conversations, through particular meanings ascribed to place and space, or to texts and sometimes monuments or buildings, which contested dominant memorial narratives' (Pine 2007:105). For example, in the midst of another conversation, Fardi said slowly to his older brother, 'Do you remember when we used to have that chair?' His brother Yihya turned, 'Oh yes, it was a lovely chair!' Fardi continued, 'It was the best chair! It got lost in 1991... there was a table too'. 'Oh *Abu Kursī* (father of the chair), was there a house to put this furniture in?' asked another friend and then they were silent for a few moments until Fardi's mobile phone rang. Later I questioned Aamal about this odd darkly humorous exchange and she explained to me that Fardi and Yihya's family house in the al-Quanawat district had been confiscated by the state, although it now stood empty.

In the previous sections, it has emerged that through the evocation of the use of objects in the house, a narrative develops as a description of social life and

economic conditions. Remembering past homes that have been lost problematically, through political agendas, seems also to employ this logic to express memories that cannot be addressed in explicit narratives of the past. As Bahloul (1996) suggests, it seems like those suffering from this kind of deracination where they are no longer physically attached to the objects of the domestic past designate remembered objects and places as historiographers and sociologists of the past (1996:64). This seems to shift the register of these objects from material and practical to sensual and symbolic, this being possible only because the repetitiveness of their past use has inscribed them and the associated social exchanges in the cultural order. Bahloul suggests that it is memory itself that mediates and animates such a process, saying ‘Memory effects the shift from the practical to the symbolic’ (Bahloul 1996:129). This type of confiscation and the silence that surrounds the loss is illustrative of a type of political action, even violence, as a material performance. The combination of the regime’s control and confiscation of property such as houses and the odd silences punctuated by veiled remembrances places narratives on buildings and social space as palpable surfaces of historical depiction.

Sharing & plurality

When recounting their memories of childhood in a shared courtyard house, Hajji and Ruqqiyya emphasised the distinction between related family units through the (non)sharing of food. So for example even when an aunt and uncle lived in the same house for a time, sharing a meal with them was indicative of a special occasion, of actively going to their part of the house and eating from their ‘kitchen’ regardless of whether this constituted a separate room or a portable but separately-owned stove. Similarly, from other accounts it seemed that it was only when an immediate family unit had been dissolved, with especially a husband dying and all children married for example, that grandmothers, great-uncles or others were absorbed into daily commensality of a younger family unit. That is not to suggest that wider commensality was not integral to this sort of domestic arrangement. Many women reminisced that celebration food involved everyone from the household and sometimes, neighbourhood (*hāra*): ‘Before food processors, we really had to work,

everyone had to take turn pounding the meat for *kiba*, tac! tac! tac!’ one woman remembered with an illustrative demonstration. This pattern of special food involving communal production was evident in the daily lives of contemporary families, as sisters, aunts, neighbours, friends as well as male relatives regularly partook in making large batches of *kiba* over the course of a day. Jean-Klein (2003) notes that for the West Bank Palestinians she studied, practices of communal cooking ‘momentarily undid the fact of owning separate kitchens’ (2003:562). For my Damascene informants this was overlaid by a qualitative demarcation, between daily cooking and eating practices versus kinship activity which brings together multiple elements of family, especially several generations. Despite drawing on resources of nostalgia, this activity is not about temporarily rebuilding a lost family commensality that contrasts with modern forms, it is a continuum of processes of building and rebuilding memory through acts of sharing and plurality.

While consuming ‘occasional’ foods, family members would share memories and situate personal events in the broader political milieu they evoked: sometimes happy memories of past family events or times of success and affluence; sometimes more poignant memories of lost family members or homes. Importantly, the earlier discussion of olfactory perception associated with preserves illustrates processes of personal history-making (Scholliers 2001) that are marked as much by the eventful as by the mundane. Such personal history-making is not only about remembering and re-remembering events, people and places during meals; it is also about creating those memories in the first place. Because processes of deracination can unpick the interweaving threads that make family close in space, time and shared experience, when wider family come to visit it is essential that the correct meal be provided to buttress that closeness of experience. When Abu Mamoun stated, ‘This is the food we would give them all as children, so this is the food we will give them now to make them grow’, he was reflecting a wider Damascene generative dimension of plurality that springs from the combination of kin and closeness as created by these domestic rituals of food sharing. The taste reminded them of the past and gave them security in the present and the future. Of crucial importance was that it was within this zone of comfort and multiple generations that families were most likely to discuss internal and international regime policies openly and critically, with different

generations offering different insights on the problems and benefits of Syrian and international politics. Strikingly, in this context young men, who remained reserved in the company of their fathers, would engage in debates with a vivaciousness normally reserved for friends or time spent with younger female siblings. In the presence of wider kin, especially grandparents, they would fully partake in family narratives along with their sisters. This reflects the change of relative status fathers and sons held when their dyadic relationship was joined by a third, making the absolute roles of ‘father’ and ‘son’ ambiguous. The moments of wider commensality within a given family often acted as important markers for otherwise unspoken opinions, as if the combination of food and greater numbers of kin both encouraged and diluted any individual’s political agency, through the plethora of different outlooks, especially generational and age-based. In this way, there are particular kin and spatial configurations where the articulation of kinship plurality becomes visible: in the manner in which it bridges distance in space and in the context of particular family meals which are fluid and often spatially communal, with family sat around a



Generating commensality: feeding kinship and plurality

small room, children clambering in and out of laps and members more or less engaged as they pray and sleep in between dishes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted how particular domestic spaces and arrangements are at the centre of Damascene memory practices oriented towards generalised and often nostalgic sociality. These memories, it seems, are mediated by the sharing of substances such as food, imbued with affective kin work and the sensual reciprocity they contain. The labour that is transformed into work through time, food and kin sociality, I suggest, is important because it contains cross-gender practices maintaining family and household integrity. Temporal qualities of food, in particular those like pickles, are utilised to transcend spatial separations which threaten the closeness of kin. Forms of sociality expressed through memories of homes and practices of commensality emphasise why and how so much work is placed on maintaining kin closeness by its members. The kin closeness made and remade by food and commensality offers an example of plurality through the coming together of multiple and often diverse kin. It is through the temporal-sensual inherent in processes of memory-making and remembering, homes, food and family, that inter-generational personification can be seen to occur. This crafting of kin, rather than emphasising repetition, the cyclicity of families and time, emphasises past, present and future. The shaping of persons in this context of plural sociality is a socially salient way in which multiple temporal-generational dispositions interact with one another. Commensal activities are one important example of where multiple generations come together and this, I demonstrate, engenders a particular type of plurality and heteroglossia, where topics of conversation and ideas emerge which point toward action. In this way I suggest, it shows how the distinctions between labour, work and action which Arendt ([1958] 1998) identifies can elide into one another.

Chapter 5.

The Transmission of Property: Old Hands in the World of Goods

Hajji, whose marriage story was introduced in Chapter 4, lived in a small apartment on the mountainside, on the site where she had once lived with her husband in a modest courtyard house. As a child, Hajji had lived in a similar courtyard house, with each of the eight rooms allocated to her father's brothers and male cousins, with their respective wives and children. When first married, she too had shared with her husband's parents and married siblings, and later had been glad to move into her own separate abode. In her account, her husband had promised her the house as assurance for her future, but her children had ignored his wishes and instead followed legal precedence by dividing the estate between them. In order to make the most of their patrimony, her grown-up children had decided to build an apartment block on the site of the older house, which they might either reside in or rent out. As a consequence, Hajji had had to leave her home and now occupied a very small apartment, in which she rented out one room to unmarried girls working or studying in Damascus. Her share of the estate was so small that she had to hand over half the rent she received from her lodgers to one of her daughters as compensation for having the whole apartment. Some of her children wanted her to move out of the apartment and live with them. This she regarded with hostility, bemoaning how she had produced such 'mean' children to firstly kick her out of her lovely home and then not even let her live in peace in the cramped apartment they had built.

The house, as Jean-Klein points out, has often been identified as a metonym of a particular form of kinship, production and politics in the Middle East (2003:558). Agnatically extended patronymic kinship associations operate in a social and political order founded on a kinship system widely known as 'segmentary': notorious for its durability and shifting political alliances (Holy 1996:88; Lindholm 1996:56-8). Within such a model, combining patriarchy, patrilineage and patrilocality, that Hajji might have expected or hoped to stay in a property of her

husband's without it being claimed by his sons and/or brothers appears novel. Such a kinship system and its corollaries are regarded as creating political configurations which reproduce 'a cascade of social inequalities based on gender, age, genealogical purity and status, and differences in access to material and symbolic wealth' (Jean-Klein 2003:558). The very success of such a house-kinship system relies on the passage of property and power between men, which largely bypasses women or regards them primarily as a contingent form of property (Hirschon 1984). Yet ethnographic and historical evidence repetitively suggests that women as kin are not only co-implicated in the reproduction of these house-kinship forms, they are also instrumental in defining their trajectory and the potential for successful political action (Peters 1963; 1978; Moors 1995; Jean-Klein 2003; Mundy and Sumarez Smith 2007). Models of Middle Eastern house-kinship often ignore the implications of the 'age' as well as the gendered hierarchy they suggest. Moreover, they do not delve into the specifics of how particularising hierarchies of age and gender might then come together to form socially viable agnatic groups in practice. The metonymic qualities of house-kinship sociality sometimes draw attention away from the material grounds of memory and hope, through which kinship reproduction is realised, such as the actual property involved in the setting up of a new conjugal unit and the changing contexts of domestic possibility (von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann and Wiber 2006). Similarly, an over-emphasis on the pragmatics of material concern and political-economic context can obscure the ways in which economic reasoning is as much an ideological or rhetorical discourse as other forms of 'cultural' value and evaluation (Jean-Klein 2003). One arena where the concerns of familial reproduction and evaluation are joined is in the sphere of property transmission, its legal definitions and its negotiated practices (Starr 1992; Hann 2008). In this chapter, I suggest that the dynamics of property transmission offer an example of where the work of kinship might be realised through social action for my Damascene informants. For Goody, intergenerational devolution of valuables, including premortem bequests, links production to kinship and marriage, and has far-reaching implications for the development of social institutions, giving it an important role in long-term change (Goody 1976; Hann 2008:146-9). For my informants I suggest that property devolution is understood as socially and

(re)productively instrumental for kinship and the ability of kinship to enact social action, which links past, present and future intentionalities.

In this chapter, the dynamics of inter and intra-generational machinations, alliances and disputes that surround inheritance and utilisation of property, are explored to contextualise the affective senses and nostalgic reminiscences of family, home and food which I presented in the last chapter. A corollary of maintaining a more diffuse kin sociality and notions of plurality, I suggest, is the effective social action of wider kin networks, in particular those of siblings. In the previous chapter, I emphasised the plurality actively generated by multiple generations' commensality and nostalgic imagery of past domestic sociality. In this chapter, I present the dynamic interplay between young and old, and male and female property rights, obligations and forms of transmission to illustrate how inter-and intra-generational property interactions are given impetus by cross-gender familial relationships which draw on reified notions of responsibility. The kin sociality, remembered in nostalgic images of past configurations, intersects with related but distinct legal frameworks and state injunctions that surround property and rights pertaining to property. There are, I suggest, benefits for agnatic corporate sibling and cousin groups which successfully navigate the power and property tensions in families and with the State. These groups of male kin are mediated by female kin and the transformational properties of making labour into work discussed in previous chapters.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the practices of 'diverging devolution' (bilateral inheritance) and 'premortem inheritance' associated with the *mahr* and prestations which accompany marriage as identified by Goody (1973). These practices of property transmission are intersected by and intersect other claims to resources and flows of property within kinship. The transmission of property, Goody argues, is ultimately concerned with 'creating a viable estate' (1976:95). Since a viable estate is one with some durability and (potential) value, it requires a certain amount of modelling of ideals which are replicable and span into the future. As Joseph points out for Lebanon, the terms of evaluation, including what might be a viable estate, are understood through the use of real and idiomatic kin relationships which turn on systems of age and gender privileging (2003:169). In this way the terms of future viability are modelled in practices and reified notions of kin sociality. Inherent in the

idiomatic figurations of kinship is the overlapping between models of patriarchy (the privileging of male over female and senior over junior), patrilineality (kin-group membership transmitting from fathers to children) and patrilocality (the close living of agnatic kin especially sons near their parents). For Joseph, when these overlapping features combine, meaning that they are mutually enforcing, they create a supportive and controlling agnatic group; the house-kinship group. Because the 'kin contract' is the civic myth which conceptualises the nature of social organisation, sibling relationships of authority and deference, love and control, are central components for the success of these agnatic groups' reproduction and realisation of social and political action (2003:171). Senior brothers embody and enact a role of brother-patriarch, while junior siblings, especially brothers, adopt a stance of deference. This exhibits what Joseph calls 'patriarchal connective mirroring': 'The process by which the person experiences components of the self 'in' the other which reflect back the self's alternating capacities for gendered and aged difference and authority' (2003:175). By this she means that by deferring to a senior brother, junior brothers are ultimately recognising and validating their own (potential) authority which comes with age and dependents. Focusing on a similar topic, Altorki (2003) raises the important mediatory roles sisters and other female kin play in Saudi Arabian agnatic practices and crucially those that can be seen as successful. In this chapter, I also illustrate the importance female kin, especially sisters, play in mediating the potential and realisation of social action beyond the family. Following Joseph, I suggest that what she calls the 'kin contract' is reflected in Syria by what Ghazzal, Dupret and Belhadj (2009) identify as a discourse of 'public good', emanating from the mutually constituting realms of state legislature and kinship understanding of property and the potential it contains. It is, I suggest, especially through the cross-generational and cross-gender work of kinship that social action and public good can be realised.

Building tensions

There is of course another side to Hajji's plight and that of her children, some of whom were themselves in the later stages of life. From accounts I collected from a couple of her grandchildren, who were closer to Hajji than her own children, Hajji

was a 'burden' in that she was unable to look after herself and unwilling to leave her flat so it might be properly rented out for much-needed family income. Her children had worries about supporting themselves in their old age, while providing for their children and felt they could offer her no more than they already did. It seemed to me that in this instance, the need for each generation to assemble and defend its own material position was entwined with the demographic and material (in this case domestic building) conditions within and beyond the family (Robertson 1991:68; Heady 2007). Claiming their inheritance and working together to build an apartment block on the site of Hajji's conjugal residence, her children had re-interpreted the older model of kin, horizontally sharing a domestic space to generate a vertical model of natal kin to accommodate their families' growth. They had lost the communal courtyard but retained elements of the life-cycle sociality such agnatic organisation engendered. In so doing, they attempted to deal with present and future contingencies of family expansion in the framework of limited individual resources and building regulation. Ironically, although Hajji's grown-up grandchildren often acted as mediators between their parents and grandmother, it was their demands and needs for private housing and sources of income which also drove pragmatic changes.

Grievances over monetary and hereditary assets like property were common elements in Damascene narratives and life-stories. Just as it was prevalent for Damascenes to stress the help they had received financially from specific relatives for education, business investment, weddings and setting up households, it was also a central part of narratives and daily conversations to stress those who had cheated, swindled, stolen or appropriated resources. From these stories it becomes evident that giving and not-giving can both be instrumental for, and detrimental to, maintaining family connections and networks. Claims on property framed as rights and obligations also offered the possibility to ignore these types of reciprocity. Generosity does not automatically lead to the building or galvanizing of relationships. Antipathy does not always lead to relations being broken, due to material constraints and other avenues of 'kinship'. Inter- and intra-generational disputes show that property relations are about mutual estimations and regard, be they positive or negative, even or especially when the material stakes are high.

With increased levels of movement into Damascus and pressures on family assets, tensions have arisen over properties that can have consequences for multiple generations. A friend of Aamal's, Nour lived on the south of Damascus in *al-Hajar al-aswad*. The home where she lived with her mother, two sisters and two brothers was a one-storey breeze-block *beit 'arabī* jammed between apartment blocks on three sides. The interior consisted of two rooms, one for the girls behind one for the boys, a toilet and a kitchen in a corrugated iron construction in the small courtyard passage that was covered in a patchwork of striped cloth and tarpaulin to exclude neighbours' eyes and winter rain. In the girls' room, Nour, her mother and her eldest sister narrated the tale of their housing problem.

Nour's mother had married her father who was 17 years her senior and he had died when Nour was nine years old. Before her father's death, the family had occupied a larger house in the countryside near Damascus. Each brother and sister had a room within the house for their family, in what they described as 'the normal way' as in a sibling group including sisters. One of Nour's aunts was living with them in this home while she was separated from her husband, whom she later returned to. This aunt was in constant conflict with Nour's mother and, I was told, even stabbed her. After this, Nour's parents left their shared house to escape this branch of the family. When Nour's father died, leaving Nour's mother and five children without an income, the whole family agreed to sell the house in the country and Nour's mother used half their share to buy their current small house, and the other as domestic income. This, however, was not enough as inflation rose; at the time of fieldwork everyone in the household had to work. Yet, they explained, the older generation were still fighting over the rights to one room, the room that had caused the initial trouble and that they no longer technically owned as a material space. Consequently, despite taking her share from the original house and taking many of its 'best belongings', enumerated as cooking utensils and furniture, the aunt contested that she owned a room within their current Damascus house. Nour's male cousins and their friends caused Nour's family 'trouble' in the form of threats and problematic rumours involving police interference. Nour's three brothers seemed unable to stop this harassment. As a result, they gave their aunt money from all their wages just to stop her from 'terrorising' them. They explained to me that they wanted

to build some more storeys on the small property they owned but they could not because all their savings were channelled towards appeasing their aunt.

After being offered this account, we briefly spoke to Nour's brothers in the adjacent room as they ate packet noodles before going out: one to his night shift job; the others to socialise with friends. They were unwilling to narrate the story again, emphasising that the events were 'in the past' and that their cousins were conducting an uncalled-for vendetta. This contrasting reticence reiterated their mother and sisters authorial role to articulate their predicament (Jean-Klein 2000). One of Nour's brothers complained that none of them could marry. Lowering his voice so his mother in the adjacent room could not overhear, he said, 'Look, not even Nour can marry because of this... and she wants to marry an alcoholic! We all have to work to get out of this, but my mother is sick... we are just going to wait and watch TV and eat cheap noodles, *shabāb* here *bināt* there [indicating their separate rooms], till they get bored'.

Given the partisan nature of such disputes, I could not access Nour's aunt and her children's story without jeopardising Aamal's friendship with myself and/or Nour and therefore could not ask Nour's aunt or cousins their perspective. This narrative, however, illustrates how past events around property division and dispute can have grave consequences for following generations in both a material sense and in the manner of perceptions and presentation. Nour's brother's words and concern for his sister were not without pathos as at 28, Nour was relatively old to be unmarried. Nour's older sister was also unmarried at 32 but did not have a prospective groom and made life hard for Nour by insisting her marriage take precedence over Nour's. The comment from Nour's brother that even though she wished to marry an alcoholic (regardless of religious or secular affiliation, one of the worst accusations made towards men) she could not, implied that despite the fact Nour had chosen someone for whom the normal bounds of reputation did not apply, her family's lack of funds and agency precluded her modest ambitions. The details and intrigues of this dispute and the tensions between and within the generations would be lengthy if fully transcribed: who is responsible and who is acting against whom, continuously shifted between whose narrative is told and under what circumstances. In the form of Nour's aunt and sister, the bilateral influence of female

kin seemed problematic for the realisation of potential the family contained materially and romantically.



A family works together to extend their house 'illegally' on the flank of Mount Qassioun.

Nour and her boyfriend did finally, after several false starts, 'elope' with much intrigue and tension beforehand. The concerns about their marriage, however, evaporated: her husband's family had little objection to the match and since her senior male kin had been stripped of their potency, either by death or repercussions of the prior dispute, her family were pleased excepting her sister who was

ambivalent. Nour and her family were in an ambiguous position; in many respects they were fortunate to have received an inheritance they could invest in property in the first place, yet they could not build on it and make it work for them literally and figuratively. The consequences of the dispute were material and forcible but it seemed that they plagued Nour and her family with a lack of confidence in the future and placement in their own space and time because they lacked future security. In turn, this insecurity was experienced through smaller squabbles and the lack of shared food or ability to be hospitable. The instability over the property and their inability to utilise their father's patrimony had disenfranchised Nour's brothers from action mediated by cross-gender relations. This contrasts with Hajji's children's relatively effective use of their patrimony despite the tensions it created with Hajji. It seemed that the power wielded by Nour's aunt, not least over her own sons, had implications which stretched into her brother's family. So how are the roles created by age and gender formulated in relation to one another and property transmission more broadly?

Property and the age-gender nexus

A technical overview of property transmission calls for a comparison between male and female rights and practices (Moors 1995; Meriwether and Tucker 1999). Such a dichotomy simultaneously reifies gender differences beyond the actual experiences of many Damascenes while in some instances underestimating their significance. These practices are not only mediated by gender but also age, socio-economic and family status. As was pointed out to me by poorer Damascenes, the gendered nature of such property transmission becomes obsolete if there are no resources to inherit, claim or borrow. Thus for many of my informants, the concern lay with finding forms of income and co-operation with which to attempt to accumulate future property once subsistence needs were met. In practice, this often meant accommodating multiple generations within small domestic spaces, and relying on diffuse kin networks which might include some wealthier members, to help alleviate the cost of rent. Structural concerns about different forms of transmission also have a very different appearance if there is a relative surplus of resources (Moors 1995).

The wealthier may regard the same types of property as substantively different/less important in comparison to the poorer, whose subsistence may rely on it. Moreover an emphasis solely on gender obfuscates some of the ways property is heavily tied-up with work within the family, between extended kin networks and legal or governmental institutions which force a distinction between the family and the State/society at large. Nonetheless, that distinctions between male and female rights, obligations and forms of transmission prevail in both academic literature and legal practice means we must take gender seriously as an essential component and understanding of what generates and spurs property transmission (Moghadam 1998). As will become evident, it is specific kinship categories of men and/or women who can obtain property rights. The movement of these categories for or against one another animates material property relations. If one category of kin persons is absent, another category may shunt into that place, precipitating readjustment of other categories and preventing any possibility of a static model being offered to explain a kinetic process.

To situate my material, it seems expedient to start with the tangible and explicitly codified property relations that sit most easily in classic anthropological discussions of kinship production and reproduction. Men hoping to marry might acquire resources to allow marriage through employment (income) and the generous or obligated help of relatives (capital), allowing them to accrue savings or place a claim on a relative's savings. Unmarried men similarly acquire money for other ventures such as car ownership, entrepreneurship and socialising, which might build social capital, thus increasing marriage and job prospects as well as being ends in themselves. Men also have access to resources through local fraternal savings groups and charitable organizations (Pierret and Selvik 2009). While married men have similar interests and options to single men, they have the added responsibility of providing for their wife (wives) and any children. They are also more likely to be responsible for other dependents such as unmarried siblings, elderly parents, aunts and uncles, as well as semi-dependents (unmarried brothers, cousins and nephews requiring capital) as they age.

Women also received resources at the point of marriage in the form of the immediate *mahr* and later, at the point of divorce or death of their husband, deferred

mahr, as discussed previously. Many women also created savings through their earnings, especially but not exclusively before marriage. Such earnings were nominally solely theirs to control and although this was often impractical, the ideal allowed them to negotiate freedoms within their family in exchange for their contribution. Unmarried women often gave this money to their parents in exchange for greater freedom while married women used such income to contribute towards and exert influence over the life outcomes of their children and family. As with men, older unmarried women often used such resources to support not only themselves but also their siblings and their siblings' children. In practice, the distinctions blur between actively 'giving' and choosing to utilise material resources in more subtle ways. For example, a young female informant had contributed her earnings to her parents and was surprised and pleased when, after finishing school, they gave her a sum of money that far exceeded her earning contribution as reward for her hard work, offering her the opportunity for a level of freedom she had not anticipated. Seemingly, the 'ideal' of female autonomy over earnings can precipitate a chain of exchanges and agency for women even though in practice, it is far from secure.

In addition to these types of resources, inheritance at the point of death is an important form of financial and material property. In its simplest formulation, men may inherit principally from their fathers with the possibility of a stake in both their paternal uncles' and their brothers' alimonies. In addition, husbands may inherit from their wives and in some instances, sons from their mothers. Meanwhile, women may inherit from their fathers, husbands and brothers (see Mundy 1988; Powers 1990). As will become clear, inheritance is (in theory at least) extremely partible (divided between a large array of kin) making the possibilities of inheritance expansive in terms of sources but fraught in terms of division. All of these types of property are mediated in some respects by age and gender, or more specifically, where any individual is in their life-cycle in relation to that of (potentially) myriad others. Thus the system can be summarised as having many possible routes of property transmission both vertical and lateral, but many of these routes are improbable for any one individual. Rather, it is specific kin categories, and their operational relations (same-gender/cross-gender and same-generation/cross-generation), which animate material transmission of property (Strathern 1999). Since possible access is multiple,

strategies for utilising and ‘cutting out’ extraneous competitors must operate on both gendered and generational levels. Consequently, not only is it an artefact of senior kin’s ‘memory’ that horizontal groups of gendered male kin are conflated, for example, my brother, my cousin, my cousin’s cousin all remembered as ‘my brother’; it is also in an individual’s interest to define themselves in terms of kin categories if they require resources. In Goody’s terms, all property transmission is pragmatically ‘balancing property against people’ and ‘creating a viable estate’ (1976:95): *whose* viable estate is often the point of tension, not least because of the divisions made between categories of kin. As is evident, women may have important access to resources. Despite being smaller, such property can still be instrumental in the viability of a family’s estate, speaking to a high level of bilateralism caused by ‘diverging devolution’ (Goody 1973) (transmission of property to both male and female descendants from both male and female forbears).

Goody’s analysis draws heavily on a distinction between moveable and productive property to highlight systemic cross-cultural patterns of estate viability and kinship (1976:12). This brings to the fore the relationship between the materiality of what is transmitted and the patterns of gendered inheritance. For Goody and authors following him, movables (such as money, gold and furniture) are often equated with domestic consumption while productive property (primarily agricultural land) is seen as the focus of production and investment. Although important in the wider political economy and history of the region (Mundy and Saumarz Smith 2007), in the contemporary and historic Damascene urban context the line between investment and consumption is often blurred, with domestic properties or movable items such as vehicles intentionally engineered as forms of both investment and consumption both public and private. Consequently, occupation and socio-economic status do not always directly correlate with each other. The question becomes then not so much a distinction between moveable and productive property but rather concerns the movable lines between investment and consumption. A case in point is that of the wealthy shop proprietor discussed in the thesis introduction, who gave his savings to his nephews for investment and had not yet received remittance but had witnessed those same nephews driving around in a new car. In the world of goods, one person’s investment might be another’s consumption

and *vice-versa*, a problem exacerbated by age-gender divisions in the transmission of property. Finding solutions that bridge these variances in perception is central to creating a viable estate; not an easy task given the complexities of property transmission. I would suggest that Damascene solutions employ the personal/social essentializing process of 'nostalgia' embodied in memories of past household sociality, commensality and reified plurality to help negotiate the specificity of property transmission with the advantages of utilising that property. Consequently, it is expedient to examine the layers of nostalgic and rhetorical claims to past sociality in relation to legal and state frameworks.

Legal persons and properties: priority and exclusion

Chapter 3 introduced the marriage narratives of Abu and Umm Bilal and their daughter Miriam, who had recently become a widow at the age of 37. Miriam had been living in Sharjah under her husband's work visa until his sudden death from a stroke on his way to the airport to join her in Damascus for a vacation. His untimely death had left Miriam stuck in Damascus, unable to access his estate for their three children and herself. She explained the events and her predicament:

That Friday I got a call from his sister, who said, 'Your husband is dead'... His sister is really bad and took everything. She even took my clothes! I cannot go back to Sharjah because my husband is dead. Without him I cannot do anything, I do not have a visa... I could only be there as his wife. I cannot get the money, I cannot claim my mahr, I cannot get inheritance so even if I had a visa I could not go to my house... and if I ask for my money they will speak to me as if I am cheap! But the problem is there is no money for his children: instead his siblings are fighting between each other over his money. The children have another paternal aunt ('amma) who lives in Saudi who came to Damascus asking me about her brother's sons. The family here are helping a bit but my father doesn't care... people in Dubai know about the situation

and some have sent money they owed my husband directly to me but lots of people owe money and they are not repaying their debts despite this. My mother is helping me a lot, she is helping me to feed and dress my family with her own money. She is very good and sweet and kind... Just today I spoke to the children's aunt, she spoke to us with a high nose [sanctimoniously] and will now give 10,000 SYP for the children every month which is enough but it is not really their share, they do not trust me and I do not even know if they will really send it.

When I questioned Miriam about whether she might get any legal help or support (although they lived in Sharjah both she and her husband were Syrian citizens) she scoffed at the prospect of legal or state intervention on her part. Moreover, her concern was focused on her two sons aged seven and five, rather than her youngest child Mira, aged three with Down's syndrome. She had previously told me that she did not think Mira would ever marry because of her disability. I wondered if she was worried about her daughter's future, but Miriam's concerns were framed differently: 'No, I will make sure her brother looks after her... this is not a problem. Getting him his inheritance is.' The future obligations her children had to each other, specifically that of her eldest son to his siblings, were both her responsibility and within her power, while access to her husband's estate was not. This illustrates the dependence between the efficacy of her eldest son, who would have to provide for his siblings in future interactions, and her efficacy as a mother in the present. There was, Miriam conceded, a history of tension between her husband's family and herself and the essential nature of their 'greedy' personalities she regarded as the primary causal factor in their lack of trust in her as guardian, however unfounded she felt it was.

Miriam's circumstances, worries and approach were complicated by the national boundaries, which after the death of her husband became untraversable. The cross-border nature of her difficulties was not unusual due to the pushes and pulls of migrant labour and socio-political pressures for family dispersal across the region. Considerations of deracination and ambiguous citizenship played some part in most

family narratives about the past century and continued to frame understandings of the future. Her reluctance to seek formal help was almost universal among families with similar financial grievances that I spoke to. Rather, many disputes were resolved through mediation from kin, friends, savings groups and local *muktās* (historically neighbourhood/area administrators, now a term used to describe a semi-formal adjudicator). On issues such as inheritance disputes, a semi-judicial role might be taken up by *sheikhs* and religious leaders reminding those involved of *sharī'a* precedence. As Moors notes, regardless of whether litigant strategies are sought through the courts, the logic of *sharī'a* law still acts as a moral framework for patterns of property distribution (1995; 2003). In line with this was Miriam's concern that her sons receive their share over her own claims. Whether driven by altruism or calculation, her claims for the protection of her children over herself mirror the logic of obligation that shapes *sharī'a* laws of inheritance. Although from my experience it was unusual that Miriam received no financial help from her father, Abu Bilal, during her difficulties, his lack of interest and to an extent deputizing to his wife was also in line with *sharī'a* logic. He happily provided shelter and sustenance for his daughter and her children, but further direct provision was the responsibility of the children's patri-kin and not his.

Legal principles¹

The *ḥanafī* School is the predominant *madhhab* ('chosen way') and the most authoritative doctrine/residuary source of law in Syria. Contemporary law relating to succession and inheritance is based primarily on *ḥanafī fiqh* (specific legal interpretation), as embodied in the Code of Personal Status² (Thompson 2000). Under such a system, when an individual dies (most commonly discussed in legal examples, academic texts and Damascene discourse as a married man with children), the priority is to pay for their funeral expenses from their estate. Following this, all debts must be paid; this is when the deferred *mahr* is claimed if at all. Within

¹ The principles presented are primarily synthesised from summaries from the *sharia* specialists at the Abu Nour foundation and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, to whom I am most grateful.

² It is also influenced by Egyptian reform legislation from the 1940s.

prescriptive *ḥanafī sharī'a* law the right of testation³ is limited to one-third for a man's estate, and cannot be made in favour of a legal heir (unless all other heirs agree). A testator's wishes should be carried out before the remainder is allocated according to *sharī'a* factional shares by the application of an arithmetical discipline (i.e. codified mathematical formulas of division based on relative fractions that can be applied to any estate). This means the remaining two-thirds of an estate are divided according to a set of principles predicated on a particular understanding of what constitutes the material benefit of the centralised 'family group' and what potential 'private good' the family is/should be capable of.

Certain primary heirs are always entitled to a share of the inheritance after any will has been applied and are never totally excluded unless they are dead or found guilty of murder. They consist of the spouse, both parents, the son(s) and daughter(s) of the deceased and are glossed as the Quranic heirs (*awwal al-farad*), between whom the primary divisions are largely confined in both principle and practice. So in families where the parents are deceased and male and female children exist, the patrimony should be divided such that sons get equal shares, while daughters each get an amount that is half that of a brother. Brotherless daughters are entitled to over half the patrimony between them and a widow is always entitled to one eighth if her husband had children and one quarter if there are no direct heirs (multiple wives must divide this sum equitably).

Along with prior death and murder conviction, illegitimacy (conceived outside of wedlock) and adoption are also *de jure* factors for kin members to be excluded from the estate, illustrating that it is concretized (through marriage) and legitimate 'blood' relationships which govern inclusion. All remaining male agnates may have some claim on the patrimony of one of their category, who can be glossed anthropologically as *aṣaba* (Eicklman 1989).⁴ More distant kindred (*ḍāwa al-āham*)

³ As in the right of testimony to distribute via will rather than legal prescription.

⁴ The term *aṣaba* is not commonly used in contemporary Damascus, rather such a group does not need classification other than 'my family' (*'aīlātī* or *usratī*) or 'relatives' (*qarīb*) as the gendered nature of such relations is context specific and self evident because of spatial dynamics. Therefore, when Rami told me that he 'spent all his time with his family', he was referring to how he worked alongside male kin (brothers, uncles, cousins), rather than at home all day with his mother and sisters. *Aṣaba* is, however, an anthropologically useful term as it stresses the male 'blood' (*aṣaba* from *nasab* meaning origin/lineage) relations that are lateral as well as lineal, reflecting important processes of social action (Linholm 1996:53-5).

within the *aṣaba* can also be totally excluded *de facto* by the presence of other heirs, as there may be nothing left to inherit. Of relevance is that agnates are excluded not by any rule of law declaring their relationship with the deceased to be inferior to other claimants, but indirectly through Quranic heirs having priority through the satisfaction of their allotted portions, which is the primary obligation of the personified estate. From the point of view of some legalised kinship categories, a dead 'patriarch' *becomes* the sets of obligations realised through the distribution of his material assets (Pierce 2003). This is to some extent reflected by the way narratives about certain instrumental deceased male family members were retrospectively employed. Thus Mawiyah's maternal grandfather was often referenced by family members as a positive role model through tales of the volition he exhibited and choices he had made, especially those of responsibility towards junior kin.

This legal concept of a property-person does not automatically detract or supersede the relationships they had (or will have) with other kin members such as male agnates once they die. Relational terms in which wider male agnates associate and defer to another are not solely dependent on fulfilment of obligation or income streams: character traits such as humour or a pious disposition were also treated as valuable resources. In a legal sense, these relationships are simply of a different order, a distinction which has been and remains central to the nub of contention in distinctions between and elisions of 'Islamic' tradition and 'cultural' tradition in the region. Thus a large amount of academic and social debate has centred on when, where and exactly how priority given in Muslim inheritance rules should be echoed out into wider social contexts, specifically pertaining to the age-gender nexus (see Thompson 2000; Manea 2011). Debate exists within Syria and regional academic discourse about the values denoted in legal principles of property transmission. For example, are women really 'worth' half as much as their brothers, and by extension men, in the broader contexts of social relations, influence and property? Or is this logic only applicable within the strict delimits of a very partible property system that seeks to provide for daughters whilst not completely fragmenting the estate beyond use? Or, does Islamic legal doctrine guard against the total exclusion of wives and daughters from the male estate and its potential *aṣaba*? The answer to these questions

often depends on the contingencies of specific families and how they are realised. Of note is that, as ‘patriarchs’, men are often quite explicitly conflated with property by junior kin, male and female, appearing more as a conduit of patrimony that all feel entitlement to.

A focus on these cross-gender principles obscures the initial importance of the same-gender and cross-generational principles at work within this model. Inheritance is so specific, complicated and inclusive of patri-kin, that it is most simply expressed in terms of its rules of relative exclusion rather than its rules of priority, and presented as a form of inheritance ‘top trumps’:

- 1) Lineal exclusion: A related person nearer in degree (by succession and blood) to the deceased excludes the one who is remoter within the same class of heirs, meaning that a son excludes all grandsons. This includes those related through another’s presence, meaning a father excludes brothers of the deceased.
- 2) Lateral exclusion: ‘Full blood’ excludes ‘half-blood’ through the father, meaning that a full brother will exclude a uterine/maternal half brother. Most relevant in instances of divorce or widowhood, remarriage and polygamy.
- 3) Seniority exclusion: Senior male patrilineal kin relations exclude agnatic siblings, so a grandfather will exclude all brothers from their share of the estate in place of the father. This third principle of seniority exclusion augments the principal of lineal exclusion.

So the potentially endless partitions within one class (such as siblings or children) are juxtaposed by a complicated formula of linear and lateral exclusions. From this we can see two elements or principles of succession, in tension though not in opposition: ‘blood’ closeness and age/seniority. Which priority/exclusion prevails depends heavily on who has been born and who survives. An example of lineal and seniority exclusion was offered by Adnan, whose grandfather’s control and lack of devolution was regarded as the source of so much familial strife. Adnan’s father had been in business with Adnan’s senior paternal uncle, importing and dealing electronics as

well as having a small workshop/factory in Syria. When this uncle had died prematurely in his 40s (sometime in the early 1990s), Adnan's father had presumed he would take over the entire business and inherit a share of it (along with his brother's children and widow). However Adnan's grandfather had insisted on his claim to the entirety of his dead son's estate, only devolving some to the son's children and widow. No-one had expected Adnan's grandfather to outlive Adnan's uncle, but because he had, he was within his rights to claim responsibility for the assets. Importantly, this would not have been so problematic had Adnan's grandfather been more forthcoming with the flow of property he controlled, offering pre-mortem capital, divesting responsibility and authority.

Syrian principles

In contemporary Syrian *ḥanaḥ* jurisprudence, the doctrine of *radd* (return of any estate remaining when all arithmetic divisions between Quranic heirs have been fulfilled) has been extended to permit surviving spouses to share in the division of the residue of their deceased partner's estate, giving conjugal responsibility a greater emphasis. Obligatory bequests have also been introduced to benefit orphaned grandchildren through predeceased sons, suggesting a particular relevance of the (paternal) grandfather's estate for contemporary Syrian society and instructive as to family patterns of value placement. I would suggest that this alteration is indicative of the emphasis placed on the third prevailing principle of property transmission which is connected but distinct to those of 'blood' and seniority of succession: that of the obligation for provision and the sets of obligations realised through the distribution of a dead man's/patriarch's material assets. The principle of obligations realised through distribution often overrides others in premortem inheritance regardless of legal prescription, meaning that women may receive premortem inheritance from their fathers and husbands who wish to protect them, and this precedence resonates with contemporary shifts in Syrian law and society.

Many of these rules of exclusion and priorities over just and balanced division of material property are only fully relevant for wealthy Syrians who, at the elite end, are unlikely to have their resources so transparently available for division.

Thus it is often only in cases like that of Miriam and her children, where a middle-class ‘bread winning’ husband/father with assets dies unexpectedly, that these complicated precepts and exclusions come into play. In practice, senior men such as Abu Bilal, and also women with property, are canny agents in the distribution of wealth as they choose before they die via premortem inheritance practices which do echo and feed back into legal doctrine where possible.

Because such a large number of heirs are stipulated, many middle-class or poorer Damascenes were in a position where any individual heir might receive quite a small amount of actual property such as a room in a house or one or two fruit/olive trees. This fractionalization of property was often circumvented by brothers (as inheriting sons) and other male claimants banding their property together in a corporate manner; the *aṣaba* made visible through the social action of cooperation. Moreover, sisters and other female kin often waived their rights in order to augment the amount received by their male siblings. Here, the cross-gender sibling relationship becomes absorbed into male ‘action’ and wider social corporations. Claiming inheritance as a sister being articulated as ‘taking’ from a brother reminds us that practices and ideals of obligation are not a one-way street; sisters conceive of themselves as having responsibilities for their brothers as well as being recipients of their protection. Thus, to say that informal strategies and practices mirror the logic of *sharī’a* is not enough.

Another solution to allotting smaller estates is to sell any property and divide the proceeds; this had and continued to be a common solution in the urban context of Damascus where estates were often divided between small uneven property investments and shares. Many choices, however, were made ultimately not on the principles of *sharī’a*, family ties or harmonious mediation but with the high inheritance tax, the confusing category of ‘economic crimes’ (Ghazzal, Dupret and Belhadj 2009) and the political workings of the state in mind. Several groups of related individuals to whom I spoke pragmatically consolidated their shares in an estate regardless of actual affective affinity, in order to avoid state interventions. Although inheritance claims were largely negotiated informally, the wider legal context in Syria is integral to the recent history of state control and the daily choices

made around property, crystallizing the reason for Miriam and other Syrian's reluctance to approach legal jurisdiction for their claims.

***Sharī'a*, civil and beyond: public & private 'good'**

The Syrian legal system is marked by competing models, rooted in Ottoman-era imperial and legal reform (Thompson 2000). The constitution, ratified in 1973 under Article 45, contains a layering of French civil law, Turkish and *sharī'a* law. Each of these conceptualises the legal person in different but overlapping ways. Where *sharī'a* law places an emphasis on specific balances of obligations, prioritising 'social persons' as bearers of a configuration of statuses, civil law is framed more generally in terms of static and absolute individual rights including ownership over a non-gendered (or aged) self and property. Later Ba'athist dogma may be seen as an attempt to mediate these two conceptions, one relational and one absolute, through notions of 'public good' which can be summarised as sublimating short-term private gain to long term 'social' goals (Ghazzal, Dupret and Belhadj 2009). All contain related but specific understandings of personal volition in terms of the capacity to translate wishes or intentions into action and to behave autonomously (or not).

It is the laws and courts that come under the Personal Status Code⁵ which explicitly interact with Syrian kinship norms and practices by virtue of their religious legal provenance (Rabo 1996:159). When narrating inheritance practices and strategies, however, my Damascene informants were more concerned with the Civil Laws and interference in their private affairs by the State and its multiple ambiguous family and non-family agents in the form of *wasta* (*colloq.* 'connections/bribes') and tax, than with the specifics of the Personal Status Code and *sharī'a* practice in Syria. For example, Abu Mamoun had as a young man suffered because of his uncle's control over family finances and his refusal to allow the family members to take Syrian nationality following their move back to Damascus from Haifa. Thus he

⁵ The Personal Status Code (legislative Decree No. 59 of 1983) regulates family relationships and inheritance by creating a division between the primary religious groups and sects of Syria. It is only the majority Sunni Muslim population who are subject to ḥanafī *sharia* law as described. Specific spiritual courts adjudicate over areas designated in the Personal Status Code for minority groups such as Christians, Druze, Ismaeli, Alawi and Shia Muslims, reinforcing the indissolubility of the person from their religious background.

related ambivalently, 'We had to do everything for ourselves, my brothers and sisters, we worked hard and *al-hamdillah* we forced it to happen ourselves'. When his uncle had died unexpectedly without issue, Abu Mamoun and his brothers had invested in his already successful barbershop and in a series of small commercial ventures which had paid dividends. Upon his own children and sisters' sons reaching maturity, he had invested in their futures via similar small projects, education and encouraging cousin marriage. By his account, it had by that time become harder to invest private finances, especially because of his Palestinian status, limiting the amount of import he could profitably engage in without being stung by heavy tax and legal red tape. After one incident in the late 1970s when he tried to import Brylcreem for resale beyond his shop, he had been called to the civil court. He counted himself lucky that his network of siblings and successful barbershop had given him access to customers and friends who could help him negotiate the situation. Now his adult sons and dependents were themselves parents and grandparents and as he pointed out, those who had accomplished the most had either emigrated (one nephew lived in Spain) or through education had risen in the army. After his retirement they all now held stakes in his barbershop either via work or investing shares, thus keeping it as a joint venture and an important communal resource.

According to Ghazzal, Dupret and Belhadj, legal changes under the Hafiz Asad regime affected the status of private property in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily in the form of 'economic laws' which indirectly shaped the civil (or 'private') elements of the law by subsuming private transactions, which included inheritance of land, properties and finance, to the State (2009:57). These laws were concomitant with a shift towards the Syrian State having natural precedence in the management of human affairs and prioritizing state projects framed as for the 'public' or 'common good' (*al-maslaḥa al-'amma*) (2009:57). They corresponded with the slow transition away from overt socialist policies of grand agricultural distribution and engineering projects towards more liberal commodity trade within Syria alongside increased isolationism/control of international trade (Hinnebusch 2009). The Syrian state has been politically framed by its elite and through its policy as the agent of social cohesion. By controlling the movement of privately triggered contractual settlements, it sought to control the boundaries of social material action. Legislation, such as the

1966 Law of Economic Penalties, defines ‘public capitals’, moveable and immovable state properties, not only as governmental or public buildings and assets but also as the ‘potential’ to accrue financial self-gain beyond authorities’ definition of familial subsistence (Ghazzal, Dupret and Belhadj 2009:58-62). What this subsistence amounts to has been a shifting set of posts depending on an array of factors: personal connections (*wasṭa*); type of property/business; administrative region; legal practice in that region, and the specific politico-economic constellation of any one period in the past 40-plus years.

Successive sets of legislation combined with the State of Emergency have resulted in a ‘novel culture’ of ‘economic crimes’, whereby engaging in trade or accruing too much (potential) private property may lead to prosecution on behalf of the public good by the State. Thus without his helpful connections and network of kin, Abu Mamoun might have faced a lengthy court process, renowned in Syria for taking years and even decades, by which time the original laws become altered, making the State litigation obsolete. This risk contributed to the reticence among my informants towards the use of official courts for sorting out small-scale property disputes, even after the 2004 relaxation of many of these laws (Abboud 2009:22). A contributing factor was that many grievances must initially be dealt with via the police⁶ as an interface with the State rather than the courts directly, due to the ‘criminal’ rather than purely ‘civil’ possibilities of such legal actions.

Property confiscation was the flipside of the coin of ‘public capital’. Stemming from the pre-Ba’athist 1958 union of Egypt, authorities permitted municipalities to confiscate (*istimlāk*) private and religious property in order to promote public housing (Ghazzal, Dupret and Belhadj 2009:62). This laid the foundations for a ‘politics of confiscation’ to be concretized in Law 60 in 1979. These state and civil changes resulted in a parallel set of constraints to those present in kin and explicitly market-based commodity transactions. Hence ‘property’ in the

⁶ If a hierarchy of corruption, incompetence and capricious vindictiveness can be discerned from Damascene accounts of personified state relations, the normal police seemed to feature highly in general perception (although distinctions were made between different sections and when personal networks penetrated such bodies). Whilst secret police (*mukhabarāt*) might be afforded more respect, intelligence and even sometimes integrity, than their more public counterparts, the ‘unknowableness’ of *mukhabarāt* territory made this too much of a risk for the poorer Damascenes to appeal to, unless they had a family member who was in a direct position to help.

form of real estate, domestic and commercial, was often not properly registered and instead routinely transferred inter/intra-kin and to non-kin through ‘legally’ devised procedures formulated by the concerned users. Detailed and confusing laws pertaining to land, the building of housing, its resale and any profits made were often systematically circumvented, though not totally ignored. In other words, houses and businesses were extended, bought and sold on an informal (‘illegal’) basis, but official legal principles were still attended to in order to avoid unwanted attention (Leverett 2005). Here is where the ‘*aṣaba*’ or other collective groups often stepped in. Via corporate familial ‘investments’ they could mediate the access to consumption of inheritance and explicitly productive property without the penalty of the law which defined ‘public good’ as antithetical to private gain. In some respects, those who were successful played off multiple related but distinct understandings of ‘public good’ with its connotations of ‘moral participation’, specifically choosing to utilise personal volition and self-interest for group action. Successfully navigating the demands of kinship and law (through whatever means) orientated their prestige not only with respect to material investment and gain (and provision for dependents) but also to their success as clever users of and conversers with(in) governance. To avoid penalties required knowledge and experience of state/legal workings, in the form of direct personal knowledge via employment or mediated by making use of diverse networks. In this way, a man was able both to enhance his own and immediate kin status through control of property (over his own dependents) and to contribute to the sustainability and prestige of his wider kin network, giving the acquisition of prestige a moral dimension and ‘public good’.

This is not to suggest that hierarchy and conflict among groups of related men did not exist in Damascus. Accounts such as that of Adnan’s controlling grandfather or disputes between siblings were common and have serious consequences. Some empty and derelict homes and apartment blocks were claimed to be the consequence of severe disputes over property between kin, sometimes escalating into violence and murder. Yet despite familial tussles for control, negotiations of material limitations generally required tacit cooperation. For many of my poorer informants, utilising volition and prestige for group action was a matter of subsistence needs of providing for family, in the form of a room in a house or that extra 1,000 SYP a week from a

share in a taxi or a workshop, which supplemented a basic income. To do this, family members would often call upon nostalgic reminiscences of past sociality and imagery of past houses and homes to galvanise affective co-operation. Moreover, there were usually quite defined hierarchies and obligations which might ultimately be called upon to override dissent, such as ‘brother-patriarch’ or the intervention of senior female kin. For example, Abu Mamoun was long retired from his barbershop business but remained the ultimate arbiter over the decisions of his descendents who varied in their investment and consumption relations to their shared income streams. By divesting property to his sons and nephews, he had maintained a particular type of authority. It was, I would suggest, the ‘positive’ model of corporation if not affective cooperation which animated both Damascene and Syrian state understandings of private and public goods.

Competing models of private and public good designated socio-spatial boundaries, defining the spheres of material action, from which most Syrians and many Damascenes were teetering on the edge of exclusion by virtue of their limited individual or private property. Like the framing of *sharī’a* law, patterns of inheritance priority, exclusion and succession, property disputes and transactions were often regarded as, discussed in terms of, and acted on in practice, from the vantage point of senior male protagonists. It was older men who distributed and were ‘constructed’ by their property whilst it was mature men more generally who were primarily implicated by Syrian governance of public good as potential ‘economic criminals’. This can only be the case if resources are available; if not, senior men remain ‘invisible’ in the state, society and family.

One way in which kin groups controlled their ‘visibility’ was the utilisation of female kin’s property and ability to channel resources at times of need. Importantly, both female property streams and male groups were required to combine in order to realise social action and make visible understandings of public good. For many of my informants, understandings of public good through moral action conjoined kinship sociality with wider understandings of justice. A couple who were friends and work colleagues of Aamal’s had eloped and were expecting their first child. Until this point, their reduced access to resources precipitated by autonomous marriage had not affected them; they had considered themselves beyond

material entrapment. However, as the birth of their child drew near, the wife became increasingly fractious. She had lost the emotional support of natal kin and had no access to the support of her husband's family. She felt unprepared; having grown up relatively comfortably well-off, she became terrified of giving birth in a state hospital. As a result, Aamal became very distressed; she tried hard to convince them to go to anti-natal classes that would assuage their fears but was frustrated by their stubbornness. The anxiety heightened as the due date loomed, becoming apparent over a stream of phone calls with Aamal, while Mawiyah and I gravely listened to one side of the conversation. Aamal was so upset, unable to eat and sleep, that Mawiyah took pity and insisted on meeting these friends. After talking with them, she returned home and emerged with a large sum of money, enough to pay upfront for the wife to give birth in a private hospital, 90, 000 SYP (around 1,000 GBP at the time).

Rather than being thrilled that her friend's worry had been assuaged by her mother's generosity, Aamal was stunned. Where had her mother got the money from? And why had she not given it to Aamal to go back to Dubai with? Aamal was visibly angry about this, scowling and refusing to speak to her mother. To me, Mawiyah explained that this was money her father had given her from when they had sold their house in Muhajareen some years previously. No-one else knew about it and she was keeping it for emergencies. She felt she had to lend it to Aamal's friends because she knew what it was to elope and have a child without familial help. After all, she reasoned, they were friends of Aamal's and would soon pay her back. Later, however, the couple defaulted on repayment and it was Mawiyah's turn to be angry, hassling Aamal to put pressure on her friends, which Aamal found very hard. Mother and daughter concurred that the friends had behaved badly as they had not paid back a penny nor had they invited Mawiyah to see their new son. Aamal's friendship with the couple was damaged but not destroyed. For a time, she was caught in a double bind between the claim of her mother and the shame of requesting the money back, especially from a friend and potential future ally.

Instances of both men and women keeping resources quiet until the 'need' emerged were common. Several older women explained how they had never told their husband about money and gold they had been given by their natal kin until their

contribution was necessary. One woman talked about how she would sew for money at night secretly whilst her husband slept in order to help their son, who wished to continue studying despite the husband's refusal. In this context, Mawiyah had been unable to make her financial intervention return a dividend or to extend her social network, although it is harder to know how it reflected on her self-image. Importantly, she was most aggrieved at not even being able to see the baby of the parents she had helped out; it seemed she had hoped it would create/reinforce a connection as well as help them and Aamal. Nine months later, however, she had finally been repaid this money, and so when another circumstance of need arose she was able to step in. Her senior brother had been arrested and was facing serious charges of financial crimes on some buildings he and Mawiyah's brothers and cousins owned. The family attested that this was a personal grudge which had escalated and should be easily solved. However, because their assets were largely contained in the problematic property they could not raise the bail or *wasta* required to resolve the situation. Consequently, although Mawiyah's premortem inheritance was smaller than all of her brothers', it was invaluable as a resource at that moment. For Mawiyah, a positive consequence of being able to help was the re-animation of relationships with some of her siblings, which had been distant for a long time. By giving them the assets she had received from her father, she restated kin bonds which might then give her support in the future. One consequence of this was her ongoing presence at her mother's house where she had moved to help nurse her father. These examples suggest that for women, financial generosity is most easily harnessed within the context of family. It also illustrates how even though female kin resources may be less than their brothers', it is exactly because they are considered autonomously 'their' property that they can be utilised effectively in contexts of need beyond immediate personal gain.

Conclusion

Within this chapter, I have presented examples which suggest that not only are inter-generational transactions important in ensuring financial stability and investment in the future, so too are the possible intra-generational groupings. In particular, these

allow my Damascene informants, even those marginal to the State's apparatus, a dynamic means of negotiating with the vicissitudes of corruption and legal attempts to take control of what they regard as their property. Because what Joseph (2003) calls the 'kin contract' draws parallels between domestic arrangements of kinship and wider sociality, there is also reciprocity between the materiality of houses, the concrete experiences of life-courses they embody and more abstract considerations of investment and valuation. This gives models of house-kinship ongoing currency so long as they are understood as heavily dependent on the signified affective relationships between and within generations.

Cross-gender, especially brother-sister, relationships facilitate and augment male 'action' and wider social corporations (Jean-Klein 2003). Giving and not giving can be instrumental for, and detrimental to, maintaining family connections and networks. The flipside of extended kin sociality is the tensions formed over access to resources, such as disputes, which filter down through generational sets of agnates thus debilitating their potentialities for social action via the control of property and its future capacities, with personal consequences for family members. The complexity of these financial and propertied relationships gives concrete grounds for rhetorics of nostalgia, which emphasise a schematic and comparatively static model of patriarchal rights and obligations and overlay *sharī'a* principles of obligation. Through such models, I suggest, the moral commentaries and warnings that I found evident in narratives of the past, especially those which emphasised the generic notions of 'fairness' and 'social good', are presented. In shifting legal and state criteria, persons, families and the State model distinct but related ways of enabling or preventing social action. In this way, a shared temporal conundrum of short-term gain versus long-term social good saturates the choices made about the way resources are utilised. Moreover, successful groups of Syrian kin or sometimes other conglomerates often played off multiple related but distinct understandings of 'public good' by utilising personal volition and financial gain for group action. The short- and long-term considerations of property flows allowed my informants to navigate the 'now' and the changing contexts of state legality and governance, in conjunction with their own interlocking life-courses.

Chapter 6.

Names & Naming: Time, Personification & Moral Grammars

One sunny Friday morning in April, Aamal and I caught a micro-bus from the mountainside district of Muhajareen. The bus wound jauntily down the precarious alleys of Qassioun's flank and joined one of the city's main arteries. Hurtling round Sahat al-Omaiyyin roundabout, we passed the Asad library and the opera house to join the *autostrad* heading south. The tall concrete- or limestone-clad apartment blocks of the wealthy district of Mezze were swiftly replaced by older squat mud brick homes slowly disintegrating among more recent breezeblock cubes. We were heading for the bus station ten kilometres south of the city at Soumoriyya, the transport hub for buses and taxi's travelling south to Derra, Bosra and the Jordanian border beyond, or west to Lebanon, where we intended a weekend excursion to Beirut.

Until 2006, buses departed for Lebanon from the central district of Baramke. As part of a national scheme to overhaul the transport system, bus stations have been moved out of the centre of Syrian cities. A corollary has been increased security measures and controls such as the checking by military personnel of passports and identity cards rather than the process being left largely to bus company employees, as previously. The national changes in the manner of security and process of bus terminals appeared not to elicit much interest among Syrians, used as they are to continuous fluctuations in the bureaucracies their lives are delineated by. The increased security signalled a tightening of one area of security where another might be loosened (if only briefly). However, on several occasions, the movement from Baramke to Soumoriyya did provoke discussion and derision, primarily because of the choice of location at the settlement of Soumoriyya itself. Established in the 1990s, Soumoriyya is a small military satellite settlement, with large apartment blocks painted with President Asad's stylised face. My informants explained that it was called after a friend of President Asad's family and had been dedicated

Soumoriyya after Soumor's untimely death, apparently at the hands of the regime. The combination of, firstly, using a man's name for a town (and a bus station that everyone must use) and secondly, the possible circumstances of that man's death were scorned as both crass and ludicrous.

This chapter discusses and contextualises Damascene approaches towards names and naming as a mode by which temporal-generational dispositions generated within families extend into spheres beyond the family. With particular reference to practices of naming that are instrumental to the shape of Damascene kinship, I discuss one way Damascenes perceive the space of their city, country and beyond, through generations and families. Peteet (2005) asserts that 'In many cultural settings names embody a sort of magical property and power. They create sacred linkages between past and future, between the contemporary and distant times and spaces' (2005:160). I suggest that it is the relationship between the temporal connectivity and personification of family naming which explains why names are so instrumental (Seremetakis 1996:28). By exploring how personal, day-to-day and 'official' naming practices are linked for my Damascene informants, I argue that the very specific sets of naming practices they employ show why naming crafts the possibilities of certain types of social action. Peteet continues her discussion of names to define their quality as 'referencing a moral grammar that underwrites and reproduces power' (2005:153-4). I suggest that the complexity of a multi-tiered naming system combined with the use of relational names in different contexts means that specific naming practices constitute subtle moral commentaries on the past, present and future behaviour and demeanour of individuals and family groups. The operational practice and logic of this moral grammar stretches beyond Damascus and indeed the official boundaries of the country, into a wider perception of the Levant and a possible 'Greater Syria'. It is, I suggest, exactly the moral grammar which extends across time and space.

Bakhtin's literary concept of the varying relationship between time and space (chronotope) has been fruitfully employed to suggest ways in which memory and narrative transmit and conjoin these abstract dimensional forms through concrete modes of expression (Holquist 2002:107). Thus Bahloul (1996) and Thiranagama (2007) employ Bakhtin's consideration of space-time narration to illustrate the ways deracination engenders particular types of memory and generative qualities. In

Basso's consideration of the moral message contained in stories about the past, he uses Bakhtin's insights as inspiration to elaborate the intersection of time and space at points in the geography of a community (1996:62). In all of these examples, stress is placed on Bakhtin's formulation that through spatial devices 'Time... thickens, takes on flesh, becomes... visible' (1981:84), by which I infer that in the chronotopes they explore, space gives substance and purchase to memories of the past, especially through kinship, thus making the passing of time understandable. In Chapter 4, I presented evidence that gave some currency to this formulation of spaces helping to realise the passage of time through their durability, loss and subsequent memorial practices, which resonates with Thiranagama's reading that 'We accrete relations in places' (2007:129). In my consideration of names and naming practices, which offer an example of 'incorporeal' property (Lowie 1920 cited in Hirschon 1984) or even 'corporeal' property and its transmission (see Bodernhorn and Vom Bruck 2006), the formulation is reversed; it is time which helps to realise space. As Bakhtin also suggests, 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (1981:84). In this way, chronotopic memories and narratives also create the dimensions of space in our perception. I suggest that the temporal-generational dispositions of kinship naming and the memorial and personifying qualities they represent, realise space, giving it substance and in Bakhtin's terms 'flesh'. For my informants, it is time, and the people who populate the time of kinship especially, that give body and substance to the spaces of the region through the moral grammar they impart.

The landscape through which Aamal and I travelled to reach the bus in Soumoriyya was understood for my informants via the names and connotive content which populated it. It was not the backdrop of Jabal Sheikh (Mount Hebron) or the semi-arid plains that my informants drew special attention to. Moreover, several were very vague about where Soumoriyya actually was: the space lacked meaning without its story. Soumoriyya signalled to and offended their aesthetic of remembering because of the context of its naming. Indeed, one informant suggested to me that it stood as warning for anyone who insulted or defied the regime. In this chapter, I suggest that there are resonances between memory, time and generations for identity within the family and in relation to society and the state. Within naming

practices, there exists a plurality and a generative personification which links past, present and future. In so doing, personal naming practices intermingle with and counter more synoptic and overtly powerful practices of naming people and defining places.

Detaching a name, inhabiting a persona

The Lebanese border official scanned Aamal's Syrian passport. Lifting his gaze, he eyeballed Aamal and looked speculatively at me. Although it was only mid-April and we were high on the Anti-Lebanon mountains, the air was hot enough for beads of sweat to smatter his face and trickle down to his heavy, dark blue uniform. He was cross and questioned my friend as to the whereabouts of her identity card, telling her that Syrians could only enter Lebanon using their identity cards and not their passports. Aamal, usually confident, was visibly unnerved by this direct contact with officialdom, possibly having noticed the newness of the weaponry and the taut strength of the official. She had often told me that the weapons held by the comparatively slight young men on military service in Syria were not loaded. On the Lebanese side of the border, I could tell she was unsure. Still, she stood her ground and argued that she was now living in Dubai and was only here for a visit, hence she needed to use her passport. This was a lie. She had in the past lived and worked in Dubai and certainly aspired to return, but for now she was resident in Damascus. She seemed confident that the border control would not be able to verify either way. The official called over senior staff but she did not back down despite now being ringed by uniformed burly men. I could see tears welling up in her eyes and it was only when one of the officials began to raise their voice and threaten incarceration that she relented. As the musty bus wound its way across the Bekka valley and then over the Lebanese mountains down to Beirut on the coast, Aamal explained to me why she had been so reluctant to show her identity card. In a low voice she elaborated, 'Two reasons. The first is that when they see my identity card they will think I am a girl running away from my family because, I mean, I am wearing a *hijab* in my identity card picture and they will think... you know'. I hazarded a guess from my knowledge of Syrian decorum and her current appearance, coiffured and fashionably

dressed. ‘You’re running away to be a prostitute?’ ‘Yes! And the second reason is that they will see my original name and I hate people knowing my original name.’

Aamal’s current passport was adulterated in order that her age was over the required 21 to apply for work in the UAE. When the dubious employment agency had changed her date of birth, Aamal had also paid for her first name to be changed to Aamal rather than the austere religious name given to her by her father, ‘Du’aa’. She was estranged from her father, neither having his support/financial patronage nor recognising his authority over her. I knew that she hated what she called her ‘original’ name and I only ever heard it used when Mawiyah wanted to remonstrate with her, as if her absent father’s malevolent spirit was being evoked.

At the time of the incident on the Lebanese border and when I first considered her explanation, I had focused on her desire to be seen as an ‘unveiled’ woman. Later, I realised that from this event and other conversations we had shared, for Aamal ‘veiling’ and ‘naming’ were linked and it was not necessarily veiling or lack thereof that was the biggest marker out of the two of her own sense of identity: how she wanted to portray her personality and how she belonged. The link between ‘veiling’ and ‘naming’ initially seemed to me slightly arbitrary. Yet they are both clear identity markers which also have elements of permanence and detachability, offering a tension that can be manipulated (Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006). For Aamal, both which name she used and whether she was perceived as a *hijab*-wearer seemed issues of moral importance. They were problematic in this instance because the identity she wanted to portray was juxtaposed against another identity. Her passport identity represented a certain amount of freedom and aspiration, and her identity card represented a socially more acceptable identity. It was the comparison between the two that was problematic, laying bare as it did the detachability of both the veil and a given name, but also implying moral ambiguity about her character to strangers.

Thompson (2000), a social historian, shows how veiling and naming were paired in the minds of the Syrian and Lebanese political radicals and elite in the 1920s; as much controversy was stirred by newspapers publishing the names of

female activists as by the writing of these ‘radical’¹ articles by women and the unveiling by women that accompanied it (Thompson 2000:127). This is indicative of the potency of names; however, it reveals that in this historical context, veils and names did not amount to the same thing. The veil was regarded as a cover, seen positively as protection and negatively as a constriction. Names were seen as things that need to be ‘protected’ along with the woman herself. Vom Bruck’s work (2006) on women from the last dynasty of the Yemeni Imamate and their ascription of male names to give them a public persona points to something similar. While here, veils and names are linked, it is the male pseudonym that is equivalent to the veil, and like the veil it acts to protect the woman within the rules of moral conduct, meaning that acceptable interaction with men who would be possible marriage partners can occur via letter writing. It seems that a major aim of both veiling and male pseudonyms was to de-sexualise/de-feminise women in a particular context in order to protect their corporeal female virtue. Vom Bruck points out that ‘Like the gaze, a woman’s name is a medium enabling contact with her through establishing a bodily image’ (2006:228) and goes on to talk of both the women’s female and male names as ‘social skins’ (2006:244). Her suggestion is that these elite Yemeni women saw their female names as body parts, and as such, they were imbued with the same moral properties and problems.

Aamal’s name initially seemed to be something equally as open to change in the future as was the possibility of veiling, since she had changed her first name on her altered passport and because she expressed views about what she hoped her maternal teknonym would be when she married². I also became increasingly aware that Aamal had made choices to make her preferred name more permanently ‘hers’ by pressing others to use it. The effort many Damascenes made to convey the individual meaning of their own given names and that of their family members prompted me to revise my understanding of how Aamal regarded what she was called. The genesis of her being called Aamal occurred during a temporary separation between her parents. While living at Suhar’s house in this period, she was

¹ Some strands of this women’s movement were truly radical in their use of Islamic theology to push against both Middle Eastern conservatism and French political and cultural imperialism (Thompson 2000:127).

² Finding out the first name of a man’s Grandfather ranked highly on many of my female interviewees’ list of courting rules, because it might determine their own title in later life.

the pet of Mawiyah's siblings and friends, one of whom she had been named after. This was explained to me as a sign of affection to both daughter and friend, and because Aamal had been such a vivacious and friendly child, the austere name Du'aa had seemed inappropriate to her character. Aamal seemed a more appropriate name given that Du'aa had been given by a father 'who did not love his children', Mawiyah explained. Layers of explanation mounted, to make Aamal's eventual insistence that Aamal was her name acceptable to close family and friends and increasingly in a semi-official capacity. Names as identity markers are central enough to an individual's moral subjectivity, possibly analogous to the body or a body part, in that they are expected to fit the person. In Aamal's case, her 'original' name and her family circumstances were inappropriate enough that it was acceptable and even legitimate for her to wish to change her name. Her brothers did not have the same desire to alter their identity, they received financial and social support from their father and so their relationship with him was less hostile.

Aamal's case was, like many things about her, exceptional. It is, however, indicative of the importance Damascenes place on the fit between name, personality, and situational context. Aamal's name-changing not only signifies an active interest in defining her own identity to one that correlated with her sense of self; it also is suggestive of the process of name-giving to children. Implicit was the need for love and validation of the role of name-giver. Aamal's father had lost the right to totally define her persona via his poor behaviour to her. Finally, it also expressed the centrifugal pressures that stretch some specific areas of kinship to the point of fracture, echoing Aamal's own trajectory away from Syria. If she had received greater financial and familial support from her father, her situation in so many ways would have been quite different. As it was, she had to make her own path and the negotiation of identity and image was central to this.

A topography of names

Despite Aamal's concerns, the Lebanese border officials did not even comment on the differences in details of age, name or relative '*hijabness*' between her identity card and her modified passport. What they thought or spoke about among themselves

I cannot know. Aamal's use of her passport to leave Syria was not picked up on by the Syrian border officials. This, combined with the ease with which she initially modified her passport, is indicative of the corrupt and often contradictory nature of face-to-face interaction with Syrian officialdom and the Syrian regime at large³ (Sottimano 2009). In this context, it could potentially be hard for 'citizens' to know what their state identity is. This demonstrates the limitations of suggesting a distinction and even opposition between 'local', 'personal' and 'private' naming practices and those of the 'state'. Scott, Tehranian & Mathias (2002) posit that 'vernacular' naming practices are fluid and about efficient utility from an individual vantage point, whereas 'state' naming practices 'require a synoptic view' (2002:5). State naming practices, they argue, are not only synoptic as a shorthand to simultaneously summarise knowledge; they are also part of a planning process that is about constructing a state-sanctioned future (2002:5). While personal and vernacular naming practices offer context and look to the past, official naming practices are concerned with the future. However, my material from Damascus, and Aamal's actions, demonstrate that such a distinction is something of a false dichotomy. State naming practices and, more broadly, identity markers cannot be separated from vernacular naming practices even when the state tries, not least because of the endemic corruption and inefficiency that characterises the systems meant to uphold them. What is more, personal naming practices can encompass questions of social morality and these moral qualities of naming mean that 'vernacular' or personal naming practices can be surprisingly 'synoptic' and forward looking in a context of large population increase and emigration. In the context of names and naming, I understand 'synoptic' to mean widely recognisable shorthand that can be easily transposed onto areas beyond the individual's localised expertise. Thus when towards the end of my fieldwork Aamal was living in Qatar and Mawiyah wished to send some of her homemade pickles, she paid an overland courier. She checked repeatedly whether the border taxes were covered by the amount she paid but still

³ The very inconsistent nature of the regime means it is hard to know how detailed and consistent tabs are kept on the population, even by the population themselves. For example, finding population statistics is extremely problematic suggesting the Syrians do not know themselves, yet several Syrians I spoke to were convinced that higher up in the bureaucracy the population statistics were known and that more senior secret police and military personnel held relevant records for areas under their administration.

she received a phone call from the border control demanding considerably more money. In order to persuade the official to let it through, Mawiyah had to detail the reasons for and circumstances of her gift. This was a humiliating intrusion into Mawiyah and Aamal's predicament, as she was pressed to divulge her divorce and Aamal's father's lack of support, illustrating how judgements about moral and social practice are refracted through interaction with distant state officials and judgements. However, in this instance Mawiyah was able to wrest control of the narrative and by judicious use of her own family name and kinship knowledge find a distant connection with the border official. By creating a connection that denoted kinship lineage, Mawiyah gained recourse to a shared past, and her memory of it through names. This process of trawling through names to find connections was often practiced, especially by women, in order to overcome problems in ambiguous situations.

Although individuals may not have the same opportunities and vantage points as the State to create an overview of social topography, families are better situated. The continuing links between members of the family and the State's infrastructure serve to increase this ability while bolstering the State's ability to do the same. What differs is the vernacular understanding of how current social topography fits with state interpretation of the past and ambitions for the future. Consequently, it is more useful to examine what ways vernacular 'day-to-day' naming might interact with state naming and identity creation, than to consider which naming practices are more or less utilitarian or synoptic. What follows is an attempt to grapple with the moral content of names and naming practices, how this impacts on Damascenes' sense of personhood and familial relations and how this allows the use of names to synopsis. Integral to this is the very plurality of potential layers of naming practices in relation to age order and relative kin status that can be harnessed.

Categories of names: given and uttered kinship

Aamal's vehement denial of her initial given name was unusual. My informants were often keen to give me detailed accounts of personal names, their meaning and how they were received. There is a distinction to be made between the name someone has

been ascribed/chosen and its meaning and the process or practice of giving a name, as in who is involved in the choosing and giving as well as the context it is given in (Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck 2006). In the narratives and explanations I collected, process and meaning seemed quite blurred, yet my informants were very exact in pointing out the distinguishing features of a ‘named’ person and how naming that person occurred.

There are a plethora of names and naming practices that are determined by birth order, gender and movement through the life course. Speaking about the Greek island of Naxos, Stewart asserts that ‘different names, both in themselves and in their use, provide a commentary on the individual’s development’ (1986:152). Nearly all Damascene names are high in connotative content, the full understanding of which is a point of pride and often educational distinction. Naming of children is an area where a contrast is evident between quite rigid patterns of lineal descent and romantic or personal spiritual elements existing side-by-side⁴. All types of naming imply a certain amount of personification of either previous kin and/or qualities a name infers.

The many-tiered naming system evident in Damascus is complex, and the name categories I encountered require brief explanation. Firstly, a distinction may be made between male first names which are inherited, and those that are not. Non-inherited male first names share similarities in their selection with female first names. Secondly, use of teknonyms, the process of calling parents ‘father of’ and ‘mother of’ a child, normally their eldest son, is practised. Furthermore, the teknonymic process of ‘name transference’ may be extended within the context of specific relationships, resulting in an inversion of uttered kin terms of address between family members. Finally, there are patronyms which are inherited by both male and female children, and are retained by each throughout their lives regardless of marital status.

⁴ This seems to be the case across much of the Middle East and Islamic world both now and historically (Schimmel 1989: 14).

Inherited names and genealogical alternation

Among the families I spoke to, it was common for the eldest son to be named after his paternal grandfather regardless of religious, class or locational background. Consequently, two names may alternate between generations of first-born sons. In practice, like the process of deferment to brother-patriarch Joseph (2003) discusses, this means a complex branching off of names as it can only be the eldest son who receives the grandfather's name. Younger sons who defer to older brothers might in the future be grandfathers and have grandsons, who can then inherit their name and will pass it on to later generations of alternate eldest sons. As such, it signifies a subtle form of lineage or genealogical divergence (Antoun 1967) indicating the micro-lineage of immediate relations of connection and splitting over three generations (Lancaster 1981). Although brothers do not share names, there is no apparent taboo about naming many cousins or grandsons of the same generation within an extended family by the same name. Sometimes, diminutives are used to distinguish between individuals. For example, there are a vast number of derivations for Muhammad, ranging from the use of the Prophet's other names such as Mustafa to affectionate terms like Mumu.

According to some families I spoke to, Damascenes historically had a slightly different pattern of naming which is still practiced in some families, although I only encountered one example of it. When any son was born, not only the eldest son, there would normally already be a name allocated to them chosen by the child's grandparents when their own son was born in anticipation of lots of grandchildren in the future. Therefore, rather than two names alternating, a whole host of names that encompassed all possible sons would be pre-selected. Contained within this practice was a very particular outlook towards the reproductive future, especially because it was linked by my informants to marked practices of family size control, the preference being for fewer than four or five children, even in polygamous households. Inversely, it was also an optimistic model that children would inevitably be forthcoming. It was explained to me that there tended to be a stock set of names that every generation would then choose for the next, meaning that this was a pre-figured way of imagining the future. Importantly, this places an emphasis on the

control and influence kin play beyond two generations, making connections over time.

Within both systems, it is grandparents who ‘give’ names to at least the eldest son and therefore names travel through generations, via joint use and also through ‘giving’. My informants expressed this directly in terms of ‘he gave me the name’ (*‘atānī al-ism*) but I also heard the use of *wrāt* (colloq.) ‘inherited’ and *khalānī*, lit. ‘he let me (have his name)’ which has connotations of force and is perhaps more like ‘he made me (have his name)’.

For those I spoke to who received these inherited names, the process of naming makes their personal existence pre-ordained. ‘I was named before I was born’ was a phrase I heard men of many ages and backgrounds say by way of explanation for not only their name but also personal status and, in a couple of instances, their life fortune. In one exceptional case, Rami, who had been born the eldest son, briefly confided that he had been given the common and family name Muhammad at birth, then it had been removed from him and given to his younger brother. He was guarded about the reason for this (perhaps he was not expected to live or had acted strangely as a baby), however he explicitly blamed the removal/extraction from him of his (his grandfather’s name) as the root of misfortune in his life. It is easy to empathise that something like that would be problematic as an explicit demotion. This exception reveals how names can confer personhood insofar as one enters into the kinship roles of the person whose name has been given to you.

Transference of name from grandfather to grandson is a very direct expression of patriarchy, where status and property are passed down generations via eldest sons in a codified manner. For those who do, sharing your name with your grandfather can be considerably more than purely sharing a name. One of my wealthier informants batted off mild taunts from her unmarried sisters about her husband’s wealth in owning two apartments by saying shrilly, ‘Nooo, I didn’t marry a rich man, I married the oldest grandson of a rich man!’ When asked, she did not know exactly how other members of the family benefited from their wealthy father/grandfather but she explained that her husband had been given property because he was the eldest grandson. Rami had not only suffered a naming but possibly also a property demotion (though not absolute). The possibility that this fate

is not set in stone, that it might be transferred via the name to a younger brother suggests a very particular generative understanding. It may not simply be enough to be given the name, the recipient may need to fit the name/role allocated well enough and if for some reason they do not, then the name is detachable enough that it can be given to a more suitable candidate so long as one, in the form of another son/grandson, exists.

Damascene emphasis on receiving names from older family members and ascribing qualities of fate and formation of personality to the practice of naming and to the names themselves reflects other ethnographic examples. Bodenhorn (2000) highlights the same constellation in Inupiaq practices of names travelling through generations. Inupiaq names embody ‘a kind of reincarnation that accrues to individuals rather than classes of people’ (2000:137). This is quite different from the way Damascenes perceive the passage of names and time. Informants who I broached the subject with were shocked at the suggestion of reincarnation: dead people are in the ground and waiting for the ‘Day of Judgment’. Bodenhorn also asserts that ‘Names contain personal essence which attaches to the human being and creates individually unique social connection through time’ (2000:137). This is closer to the manner in which Damascenes see the passage of names: as contributing to their unique temporal-generational disposition which is contextualised by those before and after them. From a research perspective, understanding detailed information about the relationship between a grandfather and grandson who shared the same name was problematic when they were discussed by others. Not only were the names the same, but the narrative connections created prefigured an overlap in



personality and experience making it hard for me to distinguish between the two or more individuals who shared a named connection. My informants, however, seemed not to find this problematic and do not appear to confuse two people who share this bond. Rather, they are very particular about their linear relationship, exactly because the linkages confer the transfer of familial and

A grandfather and his grandson share the same name.

moral responsibility.

Male teknonyms

The bond of names between such sets of generations was increased in some respects by the common use of teknonyms⁵. Confusingly, the practice of a man being named father-of- (Abu) followed by the name of their eldest son means that for example Ali (son of Hasan) is himself known as Abu-Hasan once his first son is born. Thus the eldest sons of eldest sons, at least, may find themselves in a very long line of men all at different times known by the names Ali and Hasan (i.e. Ali/Abu-Hasan – Hasan/Abu-Ali – Ali/Abu-Hasan etc). Fortunately, this confusing position does not occur for the majority of people as there can only ever be one eldest son. It acts a reminder of the special place of eldest sons as brother-patriarch to their siblings in particular, embodying authority within their generation. An eldest son is always in a position to recite or invoke their genealogy and occasionally, they do.

When considering teknonyms, something all Damascenes potentially have, it is worth distinguishing between a name that has been ‘given’ via your eldest son and a name that is uttered/called by other people. To call someone by their teknonym is to honour them; to recognise someone as an adult because they have children (Antoun 1967). Thus for most people, the teknonym is a conflation of an ascribed-acquired name and an honorific address. In Bali, the Geertz’s argue, ‘A man who has never had a child remains all his life a child terminologically’ (Geertz and Geertz 1975:90) and this lack also transfers great shame. Although there is a profound emphasis on the production of children as a realisation of adulthood, in Damascus those without sons and/or daughters are not completely excluded from the use of teknonymy. For example, the name of an eldest daughter might be used or more commonly, the already pre-selected name of a potential son is used, even when the parents have long finished having children and the potential for future sons is slim. In one family I knew well, the father was sometimes referred to by his neighbours as

⁵ In almost all of the rest of the Middle East the Arabic term for teknonym is *kunya*, however in Damascus the word *kunya* now denotes patronym or family name. I could not ascertain whether or not there was a current term to denote teknonym, since it is not referred to as such in normal speech and no-one I asked knew of a special word.

Abu-Rami despite not having any sons. It is possible that in this instance, the honorific Abu-Rami was used as a marker of equality with his neighbours since his other honorific would be *dābet* or *zābet* ('officer') from his career in the army. The use of the teknonym for someone without sons seems to contradict the very moral value that the use of the teknonym ascribes: that having a son is a source of honour and an integral part of adulthood that defines you as a 'good' person. Instead, I would suggest, the emphasis is on a more generalised notion of reproduction and a continued hope for the future. It is still framed in relation to sons but the use of Abu contains subtler generative connotations that extend to those without sons or any children. From other examples of childless men I encountered, I would suggest that the complimentary use of Abu-Rami might not have been so forthcoming had he not been a figure of authority and exhibited due care to those he had responsibility for. In this way, the teknonym can become an epithet through proven moral character, comportment and deeds.

Abu- and Umm- are honorific titles and Damascenes would rarely use them when speaking about themselves. When visiting a mosque in the ancient suburb of Sheikh Mehia ad-deen, my companion was overcome with emotion when one of the *sheikhs* introduced himself as '*akh* ('brother') and refused to allow her to call him Abu Ahmad or even *sheikh* Mustafa. To her, the refusal to use the teknonym was a profound sign of modesty. The same practice amongst monks and nuns in the Christian monasteries and convents elicited a similar admiring response among Muslim and Christian friends alike.

The use of the teknonym is as much about personal and moral qualities of comportment as it is about paternity. This is evidenced by the way that the Abu is often a suffix to a bodily feature to create a nickname or to refer in the third person to a stranger. To jokingly call someone '*Abu Daq'n*' (*colloq.*, 'Father of the Beard') might be a direct description but it also carries a host of implications about that person. Thus to give and receive names contains implications about moral character and teknonymy as used by others can infer wider (re)productive progress than the birth of a son (Robertson 1991:21).

Female teknonyms

The use of the teknonym Umm- as a honorific for women was among my informants considerably less common than that of Abu- in Damascus. From ethnographies of other Levantine regions, it seems that the use of Umm (or Imm) has been and is synonymous with all women who have children; in some instances women's given names are never used once they have children (Abu-Lughod 1993). However, as with veiling, quite intimate social practices may have changed repeatedly and rapidly in the last century. Within Syria, the Identity Card was introduced for all adults by 1920 under the French Mandate and on it, women had to use their given names regardless of their status as mothers or not (Thompson 2000:85). Similarly the archival records dating from 1900-1947 of marriage licences I looked at contained the whole of both parties' names and would have been posted on the outside of mosques for public inspection for several weeks. The common use of diminutives/honorifics such as *ḥabībī*, (my love, gender non specific) *qalbī* (my heart) and *khālītī* (my mother's sister) means that a woman is unlikely to be called by her given name by an unknown man, except in exceptional dealings with state bureaucracy such as the common need to pay to release a son from prison for a minor offence.

One explanation for Damascene women's comparative lack of emphasis on teknonyms and their preferred use of personal names, was offered by a couple of young mothers who complained that teknonyms were yet another way in which they became anonymous and 'lonely'. To elucidate requires further elaboration of how teknonyms work between generations and what sort of temporal-generational dispositions they engender in relation to other kinship practices. For Bali, the Geertz (1964) posit that 'through its progressive suppression of personal names and its regular substitution of what are essentially impersonal status terms, a curtain of genealogical amnesia... steadily descends over each generation in turn' (1964:94). The strong sense of lineality and the lengthy genealogical traditions among Damascenes I encountered directly contradicts this theory. I never heard a parent or grandparent refer to their children using a teknonym even after an eldest son is born. So between generations within living family members, teknonymy did not blur relationships. If anything, the alternating and repetitive nature of eldest son's names and teknonyms serves to assert the length and veracity of a genealogy. The Geertz

also suggest that the use of the teknonym creates a 'downward-looking' system where 'a man sees himself, so to speak, producing structure below him rather than emerging from it above him' (1964:105).

I would suggest that my Damascene informants manage to encompass all of the above in that they are both actively patrifiative and patrilineal. They are highly influenced by their past genealogy and involved in their descendents. For them these elements are not contradictory but supportive. The process of personification at work through cross-generational naming is, as Seremetakis (1994, 1996) suggests for Greek naming practices, one of situating individual kin in a temporal and generational context which through reciprocity generates new people rather than solely replicating past forms. Furthermore the interlocking of names through generations can be seen to endow other forms of intergenerational exchange with 'historical sensibility' (1996: 28). For women, however, the task of maintaining this unique place in lines of generational kinship through historicised personification is slightly harder. A woman's own biography within a family is easily swallowed, despite their active involvement in their fathers' patriline and agnatic kinship groups. Teknonymy exacerbates an already occurring process of anonymity, whereby women fall away from (or are pruned from) family memory faster than men. Keeping one's given name is one way women asserted their personal identity and relationship with their parents in particular, at least during their life-course.

As an uttered practice of kin address, teknonymy is joined by an act of 'inversion' which I have never seen ethnographically recorded in the Middle East outside Syria (Rugh 1997; Wedeen 1999). This is the continuous calling of one's children as 'Mama' and 'Baba' (mother and father), whereby a mother in particular directly addresses all of her individual children as Mama and a father likewise addresses all of his children as Baba. There is no distinction of gender between the children, so a typical example might be a mother asking her son to do a chore: 'Mama, put the bread on the table'. Although it is less common when children are adults, I did hear Mama and Baba used in intimate family settings by parents whose children were already grandparents themselves. Similarly, uncles and aunts as well as grandparents sometimes call their nieces and nephews and grandchildren respectively by their own kin term, seemingly completely inverting a relationship. Two

anthropologists who have commented on Syrian family life, Rugh (1997) and Wedeen (1999), separately cite this practice of term inversion/elision as an example of what Joseph (1994) calls 'Patriarchal connectivity' that suggests a 'fluidity of boundaries' among family members. I would concur that it creates connection and personification; however, the flipside of this practice is that personal names become even more important to maintain a sense of uniqueness to contrast with the continuous conflating aspects of uttered/called names within the home. Since women have less of an established identity outside the home, when gaining their status name via children, they may perceive the loss of their natal identity as a person. Hence their reduced use of the teknonym by friends and their husbands counters some of the anonymity they feel and re-asserts the identity given to them by their parents, often in the form of a carefully chosen name.

First names

The names of daughters and younger sons were primarily the parent's choice, expressing religiosity or other sentiments such as blessing. Given the large family sizes, this represented the majority of my informants. Like Aamal's details of her childhood behaviour corresponding with her name, individuals often delighted in telling about the origins, meaning and appropriateness of their given name. The majority of Arabic names have a meaning and Damascenes enjoy knowing these meanings⁶. For both male and female, the possible names available and the names given are numerous and diverse. Mothers often have a priority in naming younger sons and other family members have a right to contribute when bestowing names on girls.

Importantly, dreams were regularly brought up as a site where names were determined and a place where family members other than the parents and paternal grandfather had influence over name selection. Instances cited to me included dream visitations of dead relatives or someone unknown, possibly angelic, or some other

⁶ This pleasure, it was explained to me, is perpetuated by the way that Classical Arabic is known to almost all Syrians at some level even if it is simply from hearing the Qu'ran and so many actively understand the meaning of names which are based in the Classical Arabic lexicon of nouns and verbs, rather than having to search them out.

message via which a name was given to the child. For one account, I suspected that the dream was more of a vehicle for the mother to override her husband's decision when naming their second son: the religious overtones of a dream visitation of a dead relative to suggest a name are too strong for anyone to ignore. Another account by a family who had felt they had finished having children told me how the wife's eldest sister (also the husband's cousin) had dreamed repeatedly about a little girl called Yara. She had been so insistent that this was a message that they had decided to have another baby and now had a gap of over 10 years between their youngest two children. They jovially explained that little Yara was the spoilt one/pet (*mufuḍāl* (*colloq.*)) of the family whilst she beamed in her princess dress. The processes of selecting given names was often expressed as fate and this was supported by the reiteration of a name's meaning and how well it matched the personality and actions of that individual.

Patronyms & family names (*kinya* or *kunya*)

At the time of the passport altering, I had suggested to Aamal she might like to change her family name as well as her first name since it also derived from her father's family who she actively avoided contact with. She looked at me in amazement and after a stunned moment pronounced, 'No, it's impossible'. Of course, legally it was impossible, although I had presumed altering first name and age on a passport would be impossible and they were surprisingly easy. By suggesting this alteration, I was testing something I already knew about Damascene kinship; a child, especially a daughter, is always their father's ward and in a very real sense, you always 'belong' to your paternal kin even after marriage or when they do not meet their obligations to you, such as Aamal's case (Rabo 1996). This is attested by the way that women keep their family name after marriage. The Euro-American practice (by no means ubiquitous) of a woman taking on her husband's last name at marriage and in particular, dropping her natal name, was talked about with derision and pity. My friends seemed very reassured when I told them I was/had not changed my name at marriage.

Aamal's example shows how it is possible, though challenging, for a woman to remove herself from her father's sphere of authority. However she could not

countenance a change in her family name despite having nothing to do with them and being prepared to risk harassment at the border not to reveal her given name. In Aamal's case this is, I believe, indicative of two things: the generalised potency and primacy of paternal rights/obligations over family members; and the specific possibility of inheriting a share of her father's estate on his death.

Syrian family names, as in the rest of the Levant, began to be formalised as part of the administrative changes brought about by the Tanzimat of the Ottoman Empire and increased under French control and later independence (Thompson 2000). However this process, like elsewhere, was slow and patchy while in wealthy urban centres like Damascus, rich families held encompassing patronyms or 'house' names prior to this. Family names speak volumes about origin and status. They are treated with intense interest as an ongoing source of what can be characterised as social mapping for individuals and smaller family groups, even in a large city like Damascus.

One function and possible explanation returns to the moral grammar imbued within names. For example, it is much easier for unrelated men and women to converse freely if they can establish some link. By knowing someone's name and therefore the context of that individual's background, they can create a brief 'fictive kinship'. This is easier if branches of a family hold or have held positions of office or were in some way famous. This can then be used as a lynch-pin through which to connect seemingly disparate associations. For example, women I spent time with often used names to make problematic social situations less so, such as Mawiyah with the border control. Creating a brief fictive kinship allows for people in awkward circumstances to explain how and why they are in such a position; it opens up narrative dialogue. Importantly, these networks of name and knowledge extend beyond Damascus and often into other countries.

Historically, names offered more information than they do now and in this sense, state penetration has had the upper hand in structuring a synopsis of named identity. Abu Mamoun explained to me that when he first set up a business in Damascus in the late 1940s, he was known as Abu-Mamoun *al-Ḥaq al-Ḥaiḥ al – Dimashqī* (Father of Mamoun, the barber (*colloq.*), from Haifa of Damascus). This name gave a neat potted history of his family to anyone who knew him as his family

were originally from Damascus but had moved to Haifa in Palestine and then returned to Damascus after 1948. Such a neat history may not have elevated his status in itself but it certainly acted as a continuous reminder of his background and achievements to those who knew him directly or by reputation. Consequently, the imposition of a more stable last name as a main identity marker can shrink the amount of knowledge about a person that their name contains. The historical naming system in a city like Damascus was informative of both individual and genealogical history, as well as often including a reference to current or recent residence (*nisba*, *lit.* 'lineage'). The process of changing to another system of naming was more about fitting European bureaucratic models that called for a streamlined and quick form of identification than it was about clarifying identity. For those who regard themselves as Damascene rather than having moved to Damascus in the last 130 years, a surname denotes a House. Surnames of immigrants from Syria and beyond tend to denote a place or village of origin, a profession or a characteristic. Often, the actual 'house' is now lost or no longer used by the family. Some families are extensive enough that the multiple branches are also no longer connected. However, historical practices of birth control among the moderately wealthy in Damascus up until the twentieth century mean that many of these house families are surprisingly 'contained' and it is possible for others to chart them with accuracy.

These family names are not only used as a way of placing individuals very precisely; they are also seen as 'words of power' (Peteet 2005). Abu-Bakr narrated to me how his father had been orphaned and left without alimony meaning he had 'only inherited his name'. Fortunately, his father's father had come from an established Damascene 'house' and a combination of his name and the qualities it imbued had allowed his father to rise from destitution to success and found a strong family. Thus the qualities imbued in a name were regenerated for this branch of the 'House' and his descendants.

For other families, their patronym had ambiguous connotations, exactly because from their name a history could be traced. One family I knew had moved extensively around the region and had some complicated notoriety, not least the current octogenarian patriarch's career in the French army. The younger members of the family used their last name sparingly because it was so easy to identify and

contained particular connotations. At first, I thought they were being slightly melodramatic. However, on one visit, they had just got back from an ordeal. They had tried to access a government hospital to attend to a worrying lump on the father's back. They narrated to me how the hospital officials had not wanted to admit him and had only softened when his wife intervened with her name (that of a modest but plentiful family from the town of Hama). They narrated this story as a critique of the Syrian state's faults while simultaneously highlighting how well known their family name was. I discreetly asked other friends about the name in general and many knew exactly where the patriarch lived and details of the family's network. I suggest that this was an example of a common practice of retrieving information from a vast 'people map' they held, which connected people in a web of memory and kinship extending through but beyond their own family. Moreover, this map then transposed onto my informants' sense of what the space of Syria was, often challenging state practices, borders and official impositions of naming places and people. In this way the moral grammar contained in names and naming practices was instrumental in my informants' understanding of the spaces and places of Syria as populated and made 'fleshy' by the linked networks of kin over time.

Conclusion

Practices of naming and the implications of names in inter- and intra-generational family dynamics reveal the careful memorial and unique or creative qualities of names and kin personification in Damascus. The connective content of names and the right or responsibility to give and receive names are used in such a way that suggests that it is the temporal-generational dispositions, meanings and uses that texture the regional landscape for my informants; peopling and giving substance to spaces. In this way, carefully orchestrated naming practices generated within families and kinship have implications beyond the family. Inferences made and prejudices held can be seen as part of a moral grammar of names that encompasses details of Syrian historical memory through personal kinship. Combined with a surprising reach and capacity for memory of name knowledge across the region this suggests a spatial and moral synopsis that is historically constituted. I suggest that naming

practices of people and places are an important tool for understanding Damascus and its wider environs and as such, can be used for practices of daily social action which mediate the operation of the state, even at long distances. Naming contains a specific temporal moral grammar which has its own synoptic qualities. These parallel official state attempts to utilise naming to control and comprehend its diverse population within its borders and to craft the landscape.

Chapter 7.

The Making of Moral Futures

‘Mama... God Isn’t So ‘Closed-Minded’!’

During fieldwork, my self-consciously religious Muslim informants often fretted over my non-Muslim eternal soul. Reminding me that I need only convert on my death-bed that I might join them in paradise, they would tell me that since death was unpredictable it was safer to become Muslim sooner rather than later. The images and interpretations they expressed about the impending Day-of-Judgement and what would follow varied along the lines of gender and temporal-generational dispositions. In particular, senior and middle-aged women elaborated on the details of the possible eschaton and qualities of firstly waiting for the eschaton after death and then eventually entering heaven. Many of these women espoused a model of the dead waiting as ancestors in moderate conviviality, drinking coffee, watching the living and offering warnings to their descendents through the medium of dreams. When, finally, all who were allowed entered heaven, their imagery and prediction emphasised the relaxed qualities by which they might move between layers of heaven as visiting guests. Islamic scripture offers an outline of differently gradated heaven and hell, and within this they often interpreted heaven as akin to a block of flats, with small humble apartments at the bottom rising up to spacious and opulent spaces at the top. The conviviality of these spaces for reception of guests increased with higher levels, one woman elaborating the details of the superior furnishings, china, tea/coffee and sweetmeats.

All of these accounts were told with a confidence that, as true believers, they would enter heaven on the highest tiers: ‘We will be able to visit you, but you won’t be able to visit us’, explained Garda to me, implying that I would be limited to the less refined tiers of heavenly conviviality and pleasure. Importantly, women of different ages stressed that there would be no work and no marriage in heaven, often quite gleefully (although others were ambivalent about this). By contrast, senior men I spoke to outlined the presence of their family including wives, ancestors and

descendents. Younger men and women were more circumspect; denying that any interpretation of the 'unknowable' was valid. Although this does not exhaust the multifarious ways Syrians understand or predict the hereafter, it does suggest how different modalities of memory and hope align with personal orientations towards mortality. That many of my senior female informants modelled paradise in recognisable terms of idealised and stratified hospitality, reflects one current source and aspiration for sociality and prestige. It is a fundamentally social model of power and conviviality that resonates with a desire to extend kinship sociality within and beyond the family, from a vantage point of graciousness towards those quite literally below you.

In my first chapter, Mawiyah's family photographs were destroyed to allay Suhar's fear that on the Day-of-Judgement she might be answerable to God for keeping problematic images of unveiled adult female family members. Mawiyah's daughter, Aamal, had been horrified by this act of destruction and had berated her mother in the heat of her argument, saying 'Mama... God is not so 'closed-minded' [*English*]!' In this chapter, I explore three examples of cross-generational practices of evaluating and acting towards the present and the future. These practices extend beyond the family but, I argue, employ temporal-generational dispositions which are grounded in kinship practices of responsibility and inter-subjectivity, framed by the ambiguous tension between mortality and natality (Arendt [1958] 1998). My focus is on areas of life where religious practices of moralising are made explicit but in so doing, embody tensions between selves and others or facets of self. By focusing on the interweaving contexts of moral self-making, this chapter explores how specific, generational and temporal relationships, and the temporal-generational dispositions they engender, animate moral codes and their concomitant actions and behaviour. This illustrates that not only are generational differences and tensions a context that is integral to and illustrative of the practice of moral self-making, they are the driving force behind such moral obligations and the responsibilities they represent and, in this sense, social action (Spencer 1990:20). I discuss practices such as religious phrasal utterances and practices of 'pious' self-making, as contextualised by kinship, in order to highlight how these factors animate and operate as the driving force behind moral considerations which bridge this world and the unknown hereafter.

Regardless of age, position and gender, I suggest that my informants are all searching for ways to control contingencies over the future and this forces them to weigh-up long- and short-term concerns (Bloch and Parry 1982; 1989).

Contemporary anthropological literature on the Middle East boasts some innovative and influential work on the implications and practices of 'Islamic revivalism'. Authors such as Hirschkind (2002), Mahmood (2005) and Deeb (2006) focus attention on the way in which religious practices and modalities of thought cultivate virtuous and reflective dispositions, conceptions of self and moral agency. Much of the ethnographic material presented in this chapter relies heavily on examining the practices of Damascenes who would broadly fit into Mahmood, Hirschkind and Deeb's analysis, where the modern religious subject is produced through practices and relations which form the necessary conditions of their own possibilities. Thus young women in the religious groups whose Sufi-inspired lessons, remembrance and empathy practices I discuss, would explicitly tell me they had taken to wearing the veil not to hide themselves from others or from external pressure but to remind them to lower their eyes and hold themselves in modest comportment. As Mahmood has noted, these discursive practices mean that the practical and conceptual conditions under which desire to submit to recognised authority occur must be taken seriously (2005:174-88). However, this desire is complicated to assess when the 'mode of subjectivation' (Mahmood 2005:28), meaning how people are called upon to recognise their moral obligations, is oriented towards the divine. I suggest that the layering of prognosis and prophecy (Koselleck [1979] 1985) with religious acts of self-making and worries about the eschaton means that the temporal position of these subjects requires particular scrutiny.

From his work exploring the moral registers centred around watching football over Ramadan and concomitant male sociality and desire in an Egyptian village, Schielke (2010) points out that pious commitment appears as 'a fragile form of continuous self-suggestion rather than as cumulative self-perfection' (2010:33). Schielke argues that attempts to abolish ambivalence in reformist Islam, which emphasises rationality and purity, instead serve to intensify fragmentation between different orders of moral ideals and practice, situated in longer- and short-term scales. In this way contradictory ideals, needs and desires, such as proscriptive piety

versus material acquisition, led individuals to have fluctuating religious commitment throughout their life-course, not least because individuals become dejected at their own ability to meet the standards to which they aspire (2010:29-30). Consequently, Schielke's work suggests that a more situated, flexible understanding of how moral selves are cultivated from multiple sources and through changing personal contexts is required to understand the place of these religious subjectivities. In this chapter, I add to this insight by showing that for my informants, these processes are also bound with the practices of inter- and cross-subjectivity explored within discussions of kinship. In concord with Battaglia's (1995) critique of theorising which relies on the 'self-centeredness of selfhood' (1995:1-2), the work of Joseph (1994; 1999) and Jean-Klein (2000) offer examples of how their informants become moral persons through collaborative and reciprocal exercises of self. I suggest that for my informants, practices of piety and their discourse also contain facets of this reciprocity as they seek to cultivate a contextualised and present form of 'being a good human'. From this perspective, I can augment Schielke's point about the need to include 'teleologies of the subject' and moral trajectories (2010:30), by showing that the negotiation of conflicting moral priorities through the fluctuations of the life-course is also about the interlocking of temporal-generational dispositions towards concerns about the nature of mortality and natality.

A litany of scorn and its riposte

As Schielke points out, rhetorics of self-making and personal identity are often dialogically 'made up of different voices and expressions' (2010:31). In this section I suggest a way in which this dialogical process (Bakhtin 1981:50) occurs between temporal-generational dispositions within Damascus, specifically in the realm of family negotiation of inter-subjectivity which encompasses elements of cross-subjective kinship power dynamics (Joseph 1994; Jean-Klein 2000) explored in earlier chapters. At the time of my research, my favourite refrain was one cast by those who had provoked mild disapproval of their actions or demeanour from family or friends, whereby they invoked God to show their disdain. Young women leaving the house, for example, often incurred disapproval from older family members if

their attire was too showy for the street, *hijab* too ornate with sequins and beads, or make-up too extreme.¹ Disapproval would often take the form of a cry of ‘*yā Allah* have mercy!’ or ‘*Allah yablik!*’/May God afflict you!’ in this way inciting God’s disapproval of such showiness and lack of modesty. More ‘educated’ Muslims might intone sections of the Qur’an or *ḥadīth* that called explicitly and/or cryptically for careful moral behaviour and modest comportment such as ‘If the stick has grown blossom and leaves by the next day, know then, that God has forgiven your sins!’ Similarly, older siblings regularly chastised younger siblings for smoking on the street in this manner (even if they themselves were prone to this), while friends and colleagues offered such religious warnings to associates who had conducted a morally dubious business deal or accepted a job that was problematic. Thus a mother sat next to her young adult son on a long bus journey between Damascus and Aleppo. While her son was clearly enjoyed a wedding video from the Alliwitte area of Latakia, replete with close-ups of ample cleavage and young drunk couples dancing, she muttered through her *mandil* (face covering) phrases (‘God save you’ and ‘What should I do so that God will forgive our sins?’) as scorn and protective mantra for several hours of a long journey. Not all of the phrases used were automatically scornful, such as ‘as God is my witness’, but rather the tone used added reproach and the implication of warding off evil. A common reply to this, rather than alarm, upset or indignation, was for the accused to brush aside (sometimes quite hysterical) criticisms imbued with religious portent with the simple phrase, ‘God isn’t so ‘closed-minded’.

This little phrasal riposte to a scolding of some kind, almost ubiquitously uttered by young adults and teenagers to older relations and friends may have been a transient fad or an enduring sentiment in Syrian discourses. It contains context- and time-specific form and a potentially ‘radical’ and open-ended theological statement about the nature of the divine. On one level, it was often an offhand, light comment to bat away the annoying or seemingly unnecessary concerns of a worried elder. It also signalled a stand of independent thought that placed a topic beyond discussion (for that moment). Such a riposte was rarely followed up with any further scolding

¹ As make-up practices are generally very elaborate, this would mean making one’s face barely recognisable with heavy *khol* around the eyes and eyebrows, lashings of mascara, colourful glimmering/sparkly eye make-up and a thick layer of lipstick!

that might bring into question alternative understandings of what God is and whether He may or may not have a 'closed mind'. Perhaps one reason such a riposte was so effective was that it stepped beyond the conventional realms of the religious conversation between elders and their younger relations and friends which were marked by dogmatic and rapturous renditions of homilies and phrases. The comment that God isn't so 'closed-minded' implies in practice that whoever is eliciting God's name in the case of their moral argument is themselves 'closed-minded', as evidenced by their moral stance. Within actively religious families this was often an effective way for junior kin to push senior kin to pause for thought, exactly because they had cultivated a disposition of moral and religious superiority through reference to scripture which emphasised the importance of thought, experience and knowledge. The accused is effectively tied in a Gordian knot, since if one is 'closed-minded' one would not be in a position to 'know' or judge one's own relative openness. Although my informants accused by this sleight-of-hand rarely expressed it in this way, I would suggest they were quite aware of the direction such a conversation would take them if the logic was extended further. Where those enforcing a strict moral stance did take the matter further with argument and conflict over accepted behaviour, this tended to pivot on an axis of absolute power of elders (by this I mean physical restraint of some kind, where the only option would be to break these ties, as Aamal had with her father) and the fears of these elders that those they felt responsible for would make the 'same mistakes' they had. In relation to a scolding based on behaviour, demeanour and comportment, referencing the 'mind' slightly shifted the emphasis of moral concern from broadly external bodily activity to more internal concerns about knowledge, the nature of knowing and religious commitment.

What is interesting to me is how such a small phrase paralleled and offered shorthand for a whole raft of debates and events that rippled out from the 'personal' to the 'political' and back again whilst I was in Damascus. The second half of the phrase 'closed-minded' was nearly always in English, marking this riposte out as being of a very particular 'now'. The interspersed phrases, words and terminology from other languages is well established (Salameh 2010). The use of English in such an explicit way was a very specific affectation that signalled the speaker's placement in a contemporary conversation. It is perfectly possible to

express the same or a similar sentiment in common colloquial Arabic (*'aqla tsakkā* or *bāl musakkā*), but the affect and effect of saying 'closed-minded' in English was different, placing the moral content of the conversation in the here and now by its pointed addressivity (Bakhtin 1981). The use of English terms and phrases to pepper speaking was an important marker of worldliness for my younger informants.

The use of 'closed-minded' is also interesting as it places any conversation/argument in a dualism of 'open-closed' which reflects the processes of economic and political transition as presented by the government and its media in contemporary Syria and experienced by my informants (Pace and Landis 2009). In other words, the English terms 'open' and 'closed' had at the time of fieldwork a particular currency as part of a widely perceived and advertised process of economic, political and social 'liberalisation', one which was articulated as taking Syria from a 'closed' to an 'open' country, in rhetorical terms at least (Abboud 2009). Thus initiatives to create greater transparency and curb endemic corruption were framed in terms of making the system 'open' so that foreign investment was not shut out (see OBG Report 2008; Selvik 2009). As new banks and international retail outlets popped up seemingly on a daily basis, supplying products manufactured outside Syria and hard to find within the country ten years previously (Perthes 2004a), or as friends and family members left with ease to the Emirates, the meaning of the English terms 'open' and 'closed' had a very tangible impact on Syrians' lives and general perspectives². Regardless of their educational background or knowledge of English more broadly, my informants had an awareness of the meaning and social milieu invoked when those around them used these terms on a daily basis. As such, the prevalence of 'closed-minded' as a defensive phrase against moral concerns offers an insight into the use of such phrases as markers of the 'now', thus presenting continuity and change at work in moral subjectivity that is expressed through them.

² In fact many Syrians on educational and vocational scholarships were able to travel and work beyond Syria with the blessing of the regime. My informants were proud to point out that half the Syrian population lives abroad, referring to a non-citizen diaspora concentrated in the US, UAE and France. Temporary movement in the past, however, was expressed as qualitatively different as it had usually been through controlled schemes to Soviet countries explicitly to bolster the Ba'athist state, in a sense moving from one 'closed' zone to another, whilst travel to work in the Emirates and beyond constituted a different kind of personal choice.

These sorts of daily practices, which questioned interpretation of, and reasserted God through inter-generational mediums of challenge and riposte, contextualise the work of Mahmood (2005). This is framed in terms of the cultivation of a subjectivity as shaped by personal practices of piety, rather than a reaction to the forces of history and politicisation. In her valid attempt to move away from reactionary models of the development of a modern conservative Islam and focus on constituted contemporary Muslim subjectivities, she cuts out much of what it is to be a contemporary Muslim person in Egypt, in Cairo, living in a neighbourhood and most importantly with a family. Moreover, though stating otherwise, she and others on a similar mission (Hirschkind 2001; Deeb 2006) struggle to include the possibility that such subjectivities have been and are still forming and reforming through time, especially a time populated by other kin as well as past and potential selves. As Schielke points out, a person's practice and identity fluctuates through their life-course and this impacts on the ways religiosity is realised (2010). Even Mawiyah, who articulated and demonstrated a linear narrative of growing religiosity with causal events in life, stressed that she had moments and extended periods of doubt because of her circumstances. In a synchronic context many sentiments of religiosity were also refracted through inter-generational relationships and modes of experience, which rested as much on cross-subjectivity of kin as on the prescriptions of scripture or ideologies of reformist movements.

Short- and long-term moral futures

In Chapter 2, I highlighted some of the problems and solutions associated with young men's wishes to marry. The roles of multiple generations were, I suggested, critical, as financial backers and as examples of past experiences to inform future models of possibility. For my informants, grandfathers-fathers-sons in particular conjoined with concerns of mortality, correct social behaviour and an onus of responsibility which extended out into wider male sociality. Despite important female intervention, it was men who explicitly framed their identity in terms of the enmeshed qualities of financial, familial, religious and political futures. Management of even limited resources was a source of personal pride and one important aspect of this was the

consideration of possible future circumstances and resultant preparation for contingency (Munn 1992; Guyer 2007; Zaloom 2009). Thus, following a car bomb which killed 17 people, despite initially saying of Syria, *'It's better here, safer than other Arab countries, people care about being good'*, Abu Wasseem added portentously;

'For now at least. But maybe soon, after today it will change. I think it will not stay so peaceful for long... you cannot support terrorists and bad people in other places without them coming home to you one day and destroying your house. I ask, do the government think they can ignore the people on the borders and not have trouble from them? I save my money so I can take my family away when the danger comes... maybe today was nothing really, but I think there will be trouble... until then we stay and pray it does not change'.

Abu Wasseem and many others expressed their anxieties about the future politics of Syria and elaborated some of the contingency plans they had put in place in case 'it' occurred. I would suggest that many of my male informants cultivated a certain level of expertise in prognosis exactly because they had to negotiate inter-generational finances and personal moral concerns about realising their aspirations.

One cold winter's Saturday evening, I went to talk to a group of young Syrian men who were meeting to share food in one of the fast food outlets in Sha'lan. Their mood was morose and they were not particularly interested in answering my questions on family, marriage and memories. This was out of character as on previous occasions when I had met them with one of their sisters, they had been exuberant and joking. The cause of their disgruntlement was the announcement from one of their friendship group, Omar, that he had been offered a job in Qatar. This represented a great opportunity for him. Although not from a poor background, this social group was modest and a trip to the upmarket area of Sha'lan, represented a treat. None of these friends owned a car or had a wealthy family and all were unmarried in their late 20s and early 30s. The job offered to Omar was a relatively lowly role at Bank Audi in Qatar. However, he had been promised that if he was diligent he would be promoted quickly to cashier and maybe even a minor

managerial role. His potential salary was in his words '5 times' what he could earn in Syria dealing and managing stock for a medium sized clothes retailer, and more than his brother earned as a doctor. Yet his friends and he were gloomy about their imminent separation. 'I do everything with these guys,' he explained. 'We were at school, most of us did military service together, I can't imagine life without them'. His friends tried to be pragmatic, pointing out that if he worked for a couple of years in the bank, he would easily have the money to give to his parents and get married to his girlfriend. Omar tried to raise the mood by generously insisting on taking the bill and saying, 'When I am settled in Qatar all of you can come and I will get you jobs there'.

A few days later, I bumped into Omar on the street and he insisted I came with him to see his friends in a small café. He seemed very pleased and excited, and as we waited for his friends, he told me, 'I have a surprise for my friends that I am going to tell them now... I am not going to Qatar. I know now that as a Muslim I cannot work in a bank'. He explained how he did not want to leave his friends and family and life in Syria, stressing that he was needed by his parents and aging grandparents, as well as the religious prohibition of dealing with financial interest (*riba*) (see Maurer 2001). It was his *sheikh*, he elaborated, who had enlightened him and confirmed his misgivings about the moral consequences of such an action. He said decidedly, 'I realised, I did not want to be there on the Day-of-Judgement and have to answer why I worked in a bank!' When his friends arrived, they seemed overjoyed with his news at first, delighted that Omar would be staying with them and happy to extol his character for making such a choice, saying to me, 'Really Omar he is so religious, so pure'. Yet as they settled they became slightly more concerned again, asking him, 'What about your family? What about Reema (his girlfriend)? What about your future now?' The friends contemplated the pros and cons, going backwards and forwards over sweet tea. It seemed that Omar's speaking to his *sheikh* and making a decision had opened up the issue among them rather than settling it. When they had thought Omar was going, they were reticent because they did not want to lose their friend; now that they found he was not going because it contravened his religious conviction, they were concerned that their friend was short-changing himself, his family and his future. One friend pointed out that 'marriage is

half of religion', and after some debate, the friends agreed broadly that there was no injunction on working in a bank if it was the only way to support your family, as providing such support was fundamental to being a Muslim man.

Such problems were repeatedly raised among my Muslim friends and interviewees. Economic liberalisation in Syria and the seemingly unstoppable growth of the banking sector in the Gulf offered such a tempting way of earning money and supporting a family. For young men, the temptation was often articulated in terms of marriage, mirroring the way lack of funds and cost of marriage are understood to result in 'waithood' (Singerman 2007). If marriage required so much investment, the wedding, the *mahr*, the house, the car, then it was essential to utilise any means possible of earning or gaining the income for it³. Thus it presented a sincere quandary. Marriage is a means to a moral end, via children and family continuation, and itself embodies the end's moral principles. By following morally proscribed means of achieving marriage, would they negate its very qualities?

The quandaries of short-term sustenance versus long-term obligation have been considered by Bloch and Parry et al (1989) through the medium of money and transactional orders. In their discussion, they model how often necessary morally ambivalent short-term transactions interact with connected but differently-modulated longer-term goals of reproducing the household/family and concomitant cosmology (1989:23-30). Similar concerns apply for my informants. Unlike Bloch and Parry, Schielke (2010) suggests that differently-scaled moralities are increasingly hard to mediate in the light of a reified Islamic code of practice which actively seeks to remove ambiguity (2010:27). The more transcendental concerns of my informants complicate this further when spheres of self-interest and cosmological reproduction (broadly cyclical) are also joined by notions of an impending Day-of-Judgement and

³ Importantly this choice and the moral ambiguities it contains were not faced only by young men; for women they were differently figured since the onus to provide financially for a spouse is not their ideological responsibility. For girls like Najwe, the salary opportunities presented by travel to the Gulf represented freedom on several levels: it offered a (comparatively) respectable form of personal autonomy through absence from family networks, while remaining in a Muslim country; it offered the autonomy that might arise from earning money and the opportunity to then feed that financial resource back into one's own family, and for Najwe it specifically represented the opportunity to secure freedom from her father, not only for her but also for her mother and siblings and by extension similar figures of power (she often compared other Syrian men to her father who stood as a negative archetype).

subsequent re-calibration of time and meaning. As Koselleck points out, apocalyptic prophecy in particular ‘destroys time through its fixation on the End’ ([1979] 1985:14) and is thus in opposition to prognosis since it makes both cyclical and linear imagery of the relation between past, present and future problematic.

From the material presented in this thesis, however, even those who believed the Day-of-Judgement was imminent still utilised past experience to create temporal connections and try to deal with the contingency of the future. It did not, as Guyer finds for evangelical Christians, leave an ‘evacuated future’ (2007:409-10). Instead, I would suggest that it contributed to considerations of the possible ‘otherness’ or ‘natality’ of the future in the form of new families (Koselleck [1979] 1985:280; Arendt [1958] 1998:247). Financial or market transactions were not problematic for my informants *per se*, rather it was involvement in particular types of accumulative usury and interest (*riba*) which were at issue. The contradictions felt were primarily focused on the political status quo perceived as resulting in a lack of alternative options. Crucially, it was kinship and the reproduction of the family which mediated such situations via its ability to deal with the future through prognosis. For Omar, his dilemma was resolved through the intervention of his patri-kin who were able, via networks maintained and cultivated by active work for just such contingencies, to source alternative employment in the UAE. While less lucrative than banking, the job was still relatively well-paid and presented more manageable moral choices. As Koselleck argues, ‘Prognosis produces time within which and out of which it weaves’ ([1979] 1985:14), resulting in the making of political action. In this context, answerability and disclosure, as in Arendt’s understanding of the realisation of action through witnessed and inscribed heroic narrative ([1958] 1998:184, 195; see Ricouer 1979:32-33), become pivotal ways of scaling the future and its possible obliteration through the eschaton. Although agency in Omar’s case was contained within the family, his friends bore witness to his moral narrative giving it disclosure and prefiguring the Day-of-Judgement. Ultimately, submission to God’s command was the action that mediated my informants’ biographies while they strove for a closer approximation between competing concepts of historical and eschatological time.

***Dhikr*: group practices of remembering and foretelling**

Throughout Damascus, Islamic reading, teaching and meeting groups have an established history and place in religious practice and networking, especially among educated middle-class and lower-middle-class Muslim women. As Böttcher (2002) points out, these types of practices blur the boundaries between the more conservative and the more interpretive forms of Islam often presented in the ‘polemic literature’ (2002:290-1). The interpretive and (to differing degrees) Sufi-influenced quality of these women’s groups and much active Syrian religiosity differed from the reformist moments described by Mahmood (2005). Some groups had an identifiable leader, *sheikha* or teacher while others preferred a more informal and democratic learning process. Many were aligned with particular mosques, religious foundations and specific Sufi orders with concomitant ‘brotherhoods’ (see Stenburg 2005; Pierret and Selvik 2009). Others comprised younger women, who were increasingly active, in informal groups of friends, marking the importance of the female propagation of Islam alongside male religiosity in ‘Islamic revivalism’. Group members felt impelled to increase their knowledge of their religion; they had questions they wished to voice and as was stated to me, they wanted to learn from the experience of the group members, usually their peers, supplemented for the young by elders.

While conducting fieldwork, I joined friends and acquaintances attending groups like these on a sporadic basis, at the time primarily as a means to meet wider networks of Sunni Muslim women and to grasp some of the ways religious learning and thinking interacted with daily lives, family alignments and aspirations for the future. Few of my friends regularly attended these groups even if they were affiliated with them, often finding they had other priorities. Those who did attend regularly treated them as they would mosques; happy to move between groups, showing limited desire to attend any one group on a regular basis. Consequently, I came to see them as an addendum to my informant’s religious lives: these groups punctuated their theological outlook but did not offer the only basis of their religiosity. Instead, they represented an expression of parts of their identity which wished to share and explicitly learn through and from the experiences of others.

Common to all the groups I attended and heard about was a practice of group prayer/meditation, commonly called *dhikr* (pronounced ‘Zikr’, meaning ‘remembrance’, verb and noun). Unlike most mosque prayer and reflection, which even when practiced in a crowded space was largely regarded as communion between the individual and God and was demonstrated by facing in the direction of Mecca, these *dhikr* periods of prayer were held more explicitly among a group of trusting individuals who sat in an inward-facing circle. Moreover, as a prayer form these activities were distinct, as many individuals would feel it important to leave the meeting to perform private prayer facing Mecca either after a call for prayer or after the *dhikr* itself. The group prayer occurred even when individuals wished to distance themselves from Sufism *per se*, preferring not to call such meetings and/or communal prayer *dhikr*: the concept of a communal prayer that involved remembrance remained integral to the purpose of these groups.

One group I attended was one of several loosely associated with the Abu Nour Foundation. Its members broadly seemed to agree that it was ‘borderline’ Sufi, although some members preferred to stress that they were not Sufi. This group was more welcoming of me than some as they were a mixed group consisting of around two-third Syrians and one-third Muslims from other countries who had either moved permanently to Damascus or were studying Arabic at Damascus University and the Abu Nour Foundation. The primary instigator of this group was a lively Damascene divorcée in her thirties called Hanadi who gave proceedings more passion, gusto and variety than I encountered elsewhere. Meetings were often held in her parents’ apartment or she would organise for others to host meetings, and for trips to various mosques or religious sites. On arrival, women would greet each other with breathless exuberance, intoning happily ‘*as-ṣalām alīkum/ wa alīkum as-ṣalām*’; usually only uttered by women in the mosque environment, this annotated their arrival into the domestic space as being with religious intent. As each woman arrived, snippets of their day, week or circumstances emerged. Like Hanadi with her divorcée status, many of the women attending had suffered misfortune or problems in their lives, such as infertility, widowhood, domestic violence or disability. This experience of jeopardy was very common among members of all the groups I encountered. As I chatted to the women and they conversed about their lives, it was often evident that

like Mawiyah they had made choices about the level of their religiosity based on their personal (mis)fortunes. In particular, older women attending such groups attributed their fervent religiosity to a realisation precipitated by events in their life-course. Younger members, in their teens and early twenties, might also have had experiences that led them to realisation, or have been witness to the experiences of other family members (especially sisters). Personal experiences mingled with a growing sense of conviction, nurtured as they moved through life. In some respects, the constitution of this group as being made up of those who were seeking support in lives which were hard, points as much to a practical and emotional need for a social network, perhaps beyond their family, as it does to a need for religious succour. Indeed, like types of ecstatic meetings such as *zar* cults recorded in the Middle Eastern ethnographic literature (Constantinides 1978; Watson 1994), through these groups women did to a degree establish networks of emotional and economic support despite their fluid memberships. Many of Mawiyah's tutees and therefore her income came to her through these networks, and in one group I attended some women brought wares to sell such as clothes imported by their husbands from Turkey. The environment of these groups encouraged broadly sympathetic assessment of others' lives and problems by instigating contemplation of the 'underlying moral causes' of such misfortune, rather than reactionary judgment. Women would often discuss discreetly what they might be able to do to help one another, Hanadi purposefully selecting members to hold meetings that would allow them the honour of hospitality without stretching them financially. She tried further to ensure this through a strict policy at the meetings of only coffee and *fatayā* (*colloq.*) (cheap oven-cooked pizzas available almost anywhere).

To suggest, however, that social networking alone was the underlying reason or effect of these *dhikr* groups is to downplay the very importance of the remembrance implied by their name. The purpose of the religious reflection in many instances helped to create relative openness and sociality. In other words, I suggest that the very reason these groups could offer such support beyond kin relationships, was their focus on memory and remembering and its inter-subjective qualities of experience (as epitomised by the group prayer). They offered a space where other concerns about 'respectability' could be placed aside, in order to cultivate

understanding of the processes which brought women to such a position that they sought support. Deeb similarly notes her Lebanese *shi'a* informants' comments on the importance of an undifferentiated quality in group prayer (2006:105). Additionally, through these practices of remembering and the religious learning they encompassed, my informants also sought ways of solving their problems and looking more positively towards the future.

Once the group was assembled, a form of lesson/discussion (*dars*) would begin with a chosen member, usually more senior, assigned the task of exploring a section of the Qur'an and/or corresponding *sunna* and *ḥadīth*. Sometimes these topics were not led by the Qur'an but by group members' interests, such as what Islam said about the nature of creation and evolution, or how Islam might prepare one for married life. Throughout the introduction of the topic, the woman taking the group would carefully explain which bits were integral to the process of remembrance and presence. For example, one theme I attended was a lesson on one of the names of God, 'Peace', where the meaning of this name was dissected as having two major implications in Islam: Serenity and Safety. As preparation for the *dhikr* and *ḥadr* (experience of presence created by the process of group remembering) the meaning of Serenity was presented as a way of leading the group into the correct state of mind.

Sometimes the *dhikr* was private prayer and meditation, articulated to me as 'simply remembering the last day or week and all the ways God has helped and all the times we have forgotten to thank him or recognise his presence'. In this way the 'lesson' and discussion element could be seen as much as an exercise to help the participant focus on one topic through which remembrance was centred. On other occasions, when the group's constitution was more Sufi-leaning, this group prayer was more explicitly a *ḥadr* in that religious poetic and rhythmic chanting, centring on praise and the names of God, were used to focus minds towards the remembrance that constituted the *dhikr*. In this instance, the *ḥadr* had more ecstatic or trancelike qualities, with participants sometimes rocking in time to the rhythm and many weeping. The group might recite the *khatm*, a collection of repetitive prayers (such as *astughafūr Allah*, 'I ask God for forgiveness') then reach a climax of '*Allah, Allah!*' before falling into silent contemplation for about 20 minutes.

After the prayer or *ḥadr* the group would relax and enjoy food and coffee, continuing the lesson in a more informal manner. When discussing Peace, the group continued the discussion which then led into a debate about the nature of 'Peace' as practised. Of most pressing concern to the group was what this lesson told them about when it was correct to 'act' or be 'actively' peaceful and interventionist, and when peacefulness was about not acting and remaining passive. The scriptural lesson fuelled the debate but did not resolve it for the group, and instead their conversation turned with fluid imperceptibility to the messages that could be taken not from the Qur'an but from the film repertoire of Mel Gibson⁴. Many of the group concurred that the films contained profound messages within them about the nature of the importance of 'acting/action' as a form of Peace. The 'beauty' of films like 'Braveheart' was extolled as exemplar of positive action that engendered stories with new ways of understanding the world. Other members including Hanadi were sceptical, however, criticising Mel Gibson for his opinions and conduct, reminding that Islam taught that you could not 'separate a man from his message'. Finally, Hanadi ended the debate by saying in her fluting Damascene accent 'Nooo, I mean, 'Braveheart' was not historically accurate and this damages the message!'

What the meeting illustrated is that creating a religious self and moral understanding cannot be pinned exclusively to one set of dogmatic values, religious or otherwise. My informants questioned and understood morality and causality through a plethora of examples and sources. It was the layering and comparison, animated by the remembrance and empathy inherent in the practice of *dhikr* and the evidence-based conscious learning, which allowed my informants to make sense of their own moral position on their daily lives and the changing world around them. From this interweaving of their cultivated comportment through the practices of remembering and examples they found pertinent, it is possible to discern the tensions of plurality and addressivity of social action. By targeted narration of personal life and religious discourse they populated accounts of moral causality with each other's experiences (Bakhtin 1981:300). This relied on creating a comfortable group environment where individual's connections between the divine and self could be fruitfully compared and solutions to problems offered by example. In a sense, they

⁴ Although the Mad Max films were, for some reason, omitted

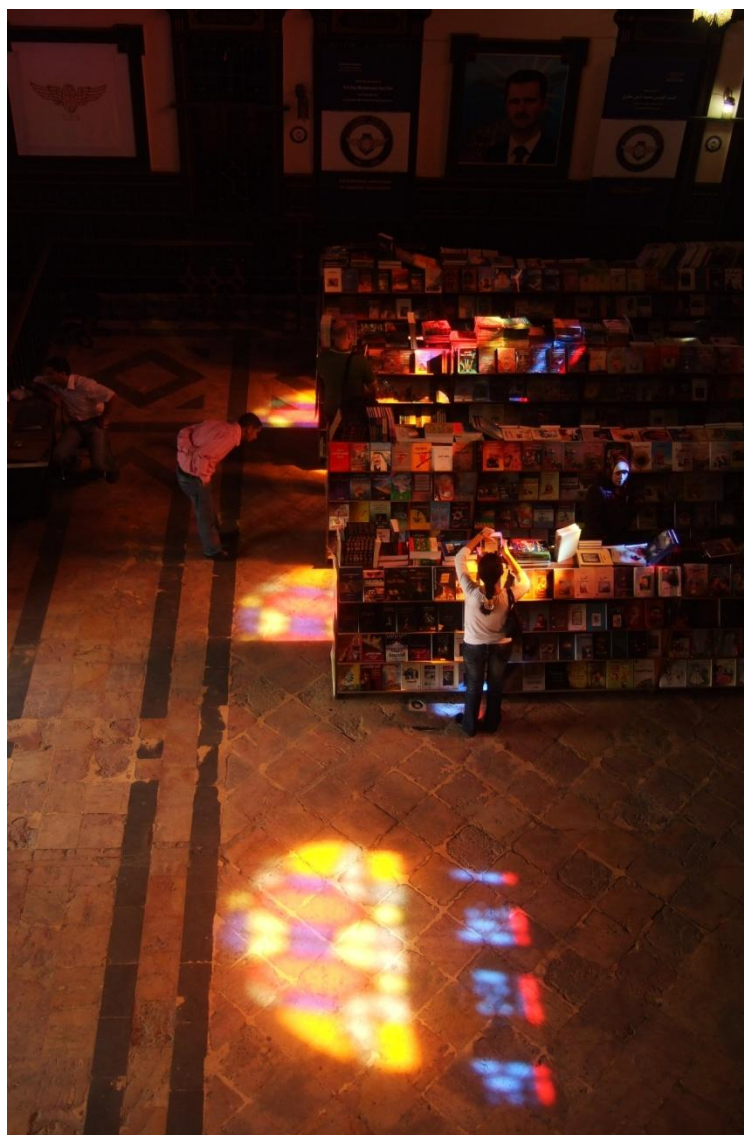
were creating selves who were attempting to be ‘open minded’, but towards particular ends, especially diagnostic. Even within a religious meeting, the explicit processes of piety and cultivation of comportment were joined by other models and concerns, as participants grappled with issues such as the abstractions of dealing with the future.

Within this group, after the food, senior members would talk to the group of younger girls and women. Sometimes they would arrive later, often coming on from another group they had been attending with their own peers. Senior women often came to offer their own homily on a topic of their choosing and on the occasions I attended, this was directed towards the impending apocalypse and Day-of-Judgement. The narration of this future event varied considerably, and its portent or originator depended a lot on the theological stance of the individual doing the telling. On many instances, the events were told as a repetition or rendition of the words, sermon or writings of a chosen *sheikh* or religious leader (Stenberg 2005). But like the scornful warnings in the first section of this chapter they also encompassed a dialogic character when younger informants responded to their content. These eschatological prophecies focused primarily on Syria as the centre of future apocalyptic action. During several of these impassioned and vividly painted accounts, the narrator stated that Jesus would return at the point of his minaret at the Umayyad mosque in the centre of Damascus, and would smite the Christians for not accepting the final prophet, following which a long period of campaign and suffering would ensue with Jesus being hunted down and building a following or an army. Eventually, Syria would be the centre of a great battle where only a small percentage of the world’s population would survive (often one in seven) and that the world would be knee-deep or waist-deep in blood from all of the carnage.

The response from the younger women can be illustrated by one such narrative from Sitt Amira which ended with the warning that ‘all the Christians and all the pigs will be sent to pay on the Day-of-Judgement! This is what is coming!’ For a moment there was a stunned silence, before one of the younger unmarried girls piped up with a piteous wail: ‘But I want to get married and have children! Sitt Amira what shall I do? When will it happen?’ Other younger women concurred, one saying, ‘I don’t want this to happen, if it happens now it’s terrible! If it happens later

it's worse... neither is fair. Later when I have children I don't want to see them die'. Sitt Amira stunned out of her reverie, tried to reassure them saying '*ḥabībī*, have children, get married, get on with your life! You have to live as if the world is forever but really you believe it will end tomorrow'. This novel reversal of a platitude about living life as if it will end tomorrow did not seem to appease her listeners. 'But what shall I do? How can I act like this message sent by the Prophet is not happening and still be a good Muslim?' Others seemed affronted by the lack of specificity in the foretelling, trying to clarify the time-line to calculate how much life they might yet live. Sitt Amira tried to bat these away, saying 'Judgement day is coming... so remember not to forget to have children!' By this point it was too late, and the younger women were questioning some of the other tenets of the prediction, such as the higher number of women who would be judged as going to hell after the Day of Judgement. Sitt Amira tried to explain how this was because there were so many fallen and treacherous women (*zāniyya* and *an-neswān al-khāynāt*) in the world, but as she pointed out herself, 'From the expressions on your faces I can tell you don't like it', adding as appeasement, 'All true believers, whatever their faith will have bubbles of protection'. It was, however, too late: a rupture had been made and as some of the women later said, it was easy for Sitt Amira to accept these predictions since she already had grandchildren. Similar concerns were expressed on other occasions: girls and young women respected and wanted to believe knowledge transmitted by their elders, but were unimpressed by the lack of fairness displayed in the imminence of the Day-of-Judgement, that might mean they would have to forego the experiences and status of marriage and motherhood. Like their male counterparts, they were concerned about the implications of a future where they would not be given the opportunity to realise fuller personhood through the care and cross-subjectivity of marriage and ongoing reproduction of the family. In this instance, the more focused discussion of what the end of time might entail also caused them to consider its implications through the potential futures they would not be able to recognise. Like Guyer's (2007) evangelical Christian informants, the imminence of the eschaton altered their relationship with the immediate future (2007:417). Was it wise, they asked, to have children who would then suffer at the apocalypse? This moral dilemma was as important for my informants as forms of pious self-making

focused on scripture and practice. Prophecy in this instance caused them to criticise the interpretations of their elders and this they could most easily do through their own dispositions of cultivated religious learning and demeanour, which relied on their inter-subjectivity as a group of young women. Thus cultivated empathy could fracture on generational grounds exactly because of differing temporal-generational dispositions.



A bookshop housed within Hilāz railway station sells self-help books among the religious tracts. Syrians find moral guidance from an array of different sources.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of cross-generation and gendered practices of evaluating and acting towards the short- and long-term future. Daily utterances

evidence how inter-generational dispositions towards correct conduct bring forth the 'now' of divine judgement and by extension morality in a set of socio-political and economic contingencies. This juxtaposes 'timeless' qualities of religious morality with a recognition that the world changes and the present contains the potential for newness as generations reproduce, with God as arbitrator. The dialogic quality of these exchanges also shows how focuses on religious self-making benefit from the contextualisation of family and inter-generational tensions and solutions. By considering some of the differences and overlaps between young men and women's concerns for the future temporal kinship intentionality, especially those of natality and mortality, extends beyond the spaces and personnel of kinship to areas of religious devotion and age-cohort generations. This stresses the temporal and inter-subjective or cross-subjective qualities of ongoing processes of crafting moral-selves and futures among friends and piety groups. The cultivation of Muslim selves I present in this chapter illustrates ongoing processes of not only understanding selfhood relationally, but actively making selves through mutual relationships with significant others.

The two examples of considering short- and long-term futures as refracted through the concerns about the 'judgement' and consequences implied by the eschaton, show gendered differences and overlap of emphasis. Types of diagnosis, prognosis and contingency are revealed by the stance and actions of both groups. While young men seem most concerned with the judgement, cast by their choices and actions in this life, which they attempt to solve through practical means such as harnessing the networks of family, young women were more focused on the contradictory consequences of an eschaton which would destroy the terms of natality and mortality. In the context I present here, some resolution was created for my young female informants through their coalescence into generational-cohort-based dispositions. The injustice of prophecy encouraged them to consider other interpretations through the religious learning they conducted as a group and privately. In this thesis, these types of generational-based interpretations were also evident in negotiations around marriage and the *mahr*, as young women and men used their religious learning to encourage new forms of practice.

Chapter 8.

Reflections on Theory & Methods

Ethnography & Anthropology of the Present, Past & Future

Concepts of time, life-course and generation create problems of translation and application, and overcoming these has been paramount in shaping my methodology and methods. How is it possible to answer questions on life-cycle and time when only having access to a relatively small synchronic window? The apparently abstract nature of perceptions of time and social change offered a challenge in terms of concrete research methods. Although I frequently asked individuals and families in Damascus how they perceived the passing of time and social change, eliciting a variety of responses, this is ultimately an anthropological question, of limited value in the field-site when asked directly. Consequently, research design and practice was based around finding means of asking and answering such a question through methods that generated greater opportunity for elaboration and observation. My interest in understanding life-cycles and historical change is limited by the length of fieldwork (18 months). Such a question calls for decades of research in order to assess the transition of one generation from younger to older and ultimately prioritises a view that transcends the lifespan of a single individual (Robertson, forthcoming). Ethnography and long-term fieldwork offer an opportunity to explore changes in people's lives as they take place over months and even years yet at least in this project it cannot surmount problems of synchronicity.

A secure understanding of methodology facilitates communication of the reason and practices of research to a diverse array of others who may not be anthropologists. My methodology was premised on an ability to translate abstract concerns regarding time into terms understandable to my informants. I found several specific topics and explanations that conveyed my research to my informants and to those I encountered more generally, from shopkeepers, to state officials, to little old ladies on the buses I took between appointments. For example, I expressed an

interest in families (*usra* (pl. *usrāt*) / *ah'l* (pl. *ah'lāt*) (colloq.) / *aīla* (pl. *aīāl*)) and the generations in them (*jīl* (pl. *ajyāl*) (colloq.)), and what things were passed down from grandparents to children to grandchildren or other relatives. I told them I was interested in the Damascene weddings and marriages (*zaujāt ash-shuwāmī* / *jauzāt ash-shuwāmī* (colloq.)) and that I was interested in how they had changed over the past century. I told them that I wanted to know what people remembered about their families and what they hoped the future would be like for them and their families. These topics summarised my preconceptions based on my personal experience of Damascus, my specific reading of the region and my broader anthropological training.

Beginnings: curiosity

A synopsis of my trajectory towards exploring the passing of time and generations in Damascus begins with my undergraduate fieldwork in Damascus in 2002. My research focused on dance and the performance of tradition, yet the interaction between generations ran through many elements of my informants' lives and disrupted any preconceptions I may have naively entertained of a straightforward lineal movement of influence and aspirations.

These experiences primed me to look for answers about social change in attitudes between generations in anthropological, historical, political and economic academic literature on the region during an MA in Middle Eastern Studies. An overview of anthropological work highlighted some of the ways 'generation' has been analysed in Middle Eastern kinship. Within classic anthropological work on segmentary lineages (Patai 1952; Rosenfeld 1968; Gellner 1969; Asad 1972; Lancaster 1981; Eickelman 1989) and marriage preference theorising (Granqvist 1931; Barth 1954; Murphy and Kasdan 1959; Rosenfeld 1968; Khuri 1970; Keyser 1974; Atran 1986) a host of generational, age-based and temporal social structures can be found, often pointing to 'generation' eliding with or crafting 'genealogy'. Considering the role of genealogy, Lancaster's Rawla Bedouin material (1981) (Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia) emphasises what he calls a 'generative genealogy' whereby the interaction and tensions between 'micro-genealogy' and 'macro-genealogy' can be seen to generate the future (1981:35). Lancaster highlights the

social, political and kinship interweaving of 'direct' familial relations 'grandfather-father-son' and the role of the streamlined and more abstract lineage in wider politics. In his work, Lancaster presents a dynamic where each relies on the other as a form of mobilisation for social action (1981:36). Alternative work rejected overemphasis on the politics of lineage, often focusing on village/urban rather than (semi-) nomadic communities, conceptualising generations in the form of 'affinal-sets' such as kinship corporations of siblings and cousins (Antoun 1967; Peters 1978). Although these 'affinal-sets' were often regarded as an indicator/outcome of a social process, namely socio-economic instability, rather than a causal feature of regional kinship sociality (Peters 1978), such studies already pointed to the social construction of generations and temporality, based on processes of identification across the life-course for an understanding of kinship. Classic structural-functionalist work and their internal critiques led me to ask if in Damascus there exists a notable intersection of vertical (genealogy) and horizontal (affinal-sets and/or age-cohort) generations and if so, what part it plays in kinship and socio-political dynamics through time.

Later work on regionally- and religiously-specific patriarchy, as based on dynamic gender and age hierarchies (Kandiyoti 1988; 1991) suggested that generations may be institutionally important in creating a system of (sometimes loving) domination (Joseph 1994; 1999). Thus Kandiyoti draws attention to the inherent structural reproducibility in Middle Eastern and some wider Islamic contexts, of what she terms 'classic patriarchy' which sees women 'bargaining with patriarchy' throughout their life course (1988:274). In this model, actors in general and women in particular reproduce the terms of their own domination by strategising within a set of concrete constraints which vary across society according to history, class and ethnicity (1991:27). Importantly, the key to classic patriarchy's reproduction lies in the operations of the patrilocal extended household where multiple adult generations negotiate their control and access to resources (1991:31). Younger, vulnerable family members, such as new brides, must enter into partnerships with those people and things which have value within the structure, in particular the production of male offspring. Thus a woman's 'life-cycle' is such that disempowerment at a younger age is eventually superseded by control and authority

over her own children and daughters-in-law: 'The powerful postmenopausal matriarch thus is the other side of the coin of this form of patriarchy' (1991:31). The anticipation of later power, argues Kandiyoti, results in the internalisation of patriarchy by women (1988:279). Kandiyoti's focus on gender means that despite her call for 'finely grained historical analyses' of kinship systems, the state and Islam and how they 'intersect, interact and change' (1991:38), the model itself is decidedly foreclosed and despite its dialectical underpinning, cyclical. Consequently, it is hard to countenance the possibility of change generated from within kinship.

Also focusing on the reproduction of patriarchy, Joseph (1994; 1999a) portrays Arab familial cross-gender relationships, within and between generations, such as sister-brother and mother-son as sites where subjects act out their gender identity and moral status, reciprocally and recursively. In so doing, Joseph makes a decisive shift towards an emphasis on the practice and lived experience of gender/age dynamics. She considers how a system that entails structural relations that privilege the initiative of males and elders (patriarchy) is mutually constituted with a type of selfhood in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that each feels a part of significant others (1999a:12). She coins the terms 'intimate selving' and 'patriarchal connectivity' to express the way specific forms of connectivity, primarily based on love, could be instruments of domination and patriarchy, while patriarchy could also be the structural means of reproducing fluid selves (1999a:13).

Patriarchy as modelled in these works presupposes domination and therefore age is fundamentally constituted in these terms. However, Jean-Klein (2000) shows how in the context of Palestinian nation-building, specific inter- and intra-generational relationships' potencies were predicated on equality as much as on authority (2000:114). Her work decouples patriarchal connectivity from an emphasis on the psychoanalytic, shifting focus onto affective exchanges through other idioms of kinship, such as corporeality and nurture (2000:101). The implication is that just as gender roles are rarely absolute, age-based generation roles can also contain the potential for flexibility or even fragility. Equally instructive is Peteet's work (1994) arguing that the political context of the first *intifāda* resulted in Palestinians' utilisation and shifting notions of generational dynamics. Here, younger men's

physical and political agency in acts of resistance and subsequent detention/punishment, altered their position in relation to older married men whose focus remained on providing for their family in turbulent times (1994:43). Two different forms of male generational dynamics were at play. However, strikingly, it was older women, mothers of *shabāb*, who were the vocal narrators of this labour division and complication of inter-generational power dynamics (1994:44). These observations open the question of how notions of age and generation within families may be put to work for various ends, such as political and economic action. It also shows that cultural repertoires of honour, gender and aged authority can undergo historical change within the bound of kinship (Jean-Klein 2000:102-103).

Literature explicitly focused on the role of women or framed by a feminist agenda makes it hard not to regard Middle Eastern society in terms of gendered domination; still more to see that gender may not have a monopoly on kinship relations. Considering Middle Eastern kinship through the lens of gender has often led to an emphasis on particular gendered duals/dyads such as ‘husband-wife’, ‘mother-son’ and ‘brother-sister’ (Mernissi 1987; Moghadam 2003). Such dyadic pairs are theorised as the dynamic core of family and social life, with the unintended consequence that other kinship combinations such as ‘grandparent-parent-grandchild’ or ‘uncle-nephew’ are considered as adjuncts which reinforce already ordained structures. At times, this leads to slippage or inadvertent ballast for approaches to kinship in the Middle East which ‘suggest the existence of a nearly total conceptual and social dichotomy between women and men’ (Tapper 1998/99:117). As a consequence, accounts of kinship have found it hard to account for shifting patterns of change generated from within the families they study, even when such change is suggested by their data (Al-Khayyat 1990; Inhorn 2012). This limitation is complicated by the intersection between current and historical feminist thought within and about the region, the reactions to it and political hyperbole (see Ahmed 1992).

Within this thesis, gendered dyadic pairs and associative corollaries are both ethnographically described and analytically called upon to understand Damascene kinship. Certainly gender is expressed and framed as key to the social world I describe. It would be hard to deny its importance given that, as a woman, my

fieldwork interactions were channelled primarily towards or through other women, and thus much of the data presented is about Damascene women's lives. It is a paramount social fact that distancing myself from men in specific ways was often a condition for creating meaningful relationships with women in particular and, paradoxically, with men through constructing myself as morally 'acceptable'. However, since my approach to kinship is framed in terms primarily of time and generations, it offers an altered perspective to anthropological work that makes gender its subject and active agent in Middle Eastern kinship. This does not completely detach my work from patriarchy; instead, patriarchy is regarded throughout this thesis as a heuristic device that as an aged and gendered status model sheds light on the interplay of specific cross-subjectivities.

Middles: ethnographic & historical fieldwork

Throughout this thesis, I present evidence that Damascenes are 'masters of their own archival arts' (Faubion 1993:36), sharing with me an awareness of the lessons, liabilities and licence that might be derived from the past. Accessing and analysing these processes required awareness of the relationship between historical and ethnographic methods of enquiry. Not without reason, temporality, history or historicity and social transformation are conflated in various different ways by anthropologists and historians alike, as well as potentially their subjects. There is an argument to be made, as Faubion does, that many historians and anthropologists share an expertise in descriptive integration of particular phenomena, trying to fit elements and pieces into more encompassing empirical totalities (1993:38). This idiographic crossover has, in the twenty years since Faubion suggested that anthropologists' use and abuse of history required its own exegesis, become a source of refined methods and possibilities for anthropologists and historians alike (Hodges 2008). For both, these methods are often about finding more insightful ways of encompassing the 'moment' within the longer term and understanding how the longer term works on and through the 'moment' (see James and Mills 2005). As the historian Koselleck notes, it is the juxtaposition of 'experience and expectation' which 'indicate[s] an anthropological condition without which history is neither possible nor conceivable' ([1979] 1985:270). It is exactly this relationship between

the disciplines, particularly with regard to defining the bounds of experience, which shapes my approach to temporality, history and generations as focused towards the modalities of memory and hope.

As Fortes shrewdly suggests, by observing ‘networks of relations’ inferences may be drawn about temporality ([1949] 1970:32). My observational focus attempted to stay with Damascene kinship networks in an effort to discern concrete expressions of their perceptions of time. As a methodological orientation, this relied on approaching the subjects of ‘time’ and ‘perception’ laterally as well as directly whenever I could, by immersing myself in the daily sociality of kinship. As other regional work suggested (Bourdieu [1977] 1995; Bahloul 1996; Rugh 1997), my approach was premised on the temporality of domestic and social routines revealing itself to offer a springboard from which to approach ‘temporalities’ in other ways. By starting with the quotidian practicalities and rhythms of time, I sought to find a language through which to comprehend expressions of the past, present and future. Initially, this required me to become an observing participant in the everyday activities of one family by living with them.

This common ethnographic technique came to fruition for me as I began to insert myself in Damascus, initially as a student of Arabic at the University, then as a private student grappling with colloquial Syrian Arabic. I found lodgings with Mawiyah and her children through her eldest daughter Aamal, who became the first family to participate in my research. Their home afforded me several advantages. Mawiyah was a divorcee living with her children, and the lack of older male residents gave me greater freedom within the domestic space. The marginality of Mawiyah’s divorced status, initially a concern, quickly became a way of casting into relief what was ‘important’ and ‘effective’ in the other examples of Damascene kinship I encountered. Moreover, it placed me at a node within a wider network of kin, households, neighbours and friends whose links were continuously enacted, severed and healed. For over five months, this was the base of my approach and some of my most evocative ethnographic material occurred as events and processes during this time. Participation in the practice of routine is invaluable in instilling the importance and mechanisms of family operations. This engagement in daily family

life was premised on the idea that time was imbued in the spaces, objects and personnel of families in Damascus (Munn 1992; Bahloul 1996).

Of particular methodological note is the conundrum of loyalty. During fieldwork, situations continually presented themselves that made performing wider sociological research, or engaging in participant observation/observing participation with families, to an extent mutually exclusive (Dresch 2000). This requirement for loyalty on my part to particular families has shaped the outcome of my research. Experiencing and being prepared to participate in this loyalty was fundamental both to effective research and to understanding some central issues I wished to explore. It placed limits and frustrations on some of the extents and avenues I could pursue as an anthropologist interested in wider social trends.

My research is centred ethnographically on six families and their networks. These families comprised parents with children covering a range of ages from new infants to early adulthood. All but one of the families also encompassed other generations, primarily the children's grandparents. Four families extended to four living generations. All six families extended laterally as well as vertically, engaging in more or less regular contact with their extended kin and expanding and contracting to include friends, neighbours and other acquaintances at times.

Shifting household compositions over the time of fieldwork makes it hard to generalise their living patterns. An emphasis was placed on 'nuclear' family arrangements but with close proximity to other kin. I consider most of these families as being at the wealthier end of the spectrum of the wider family networks with whom I conducted fieldwork, and would place them as socio-economically and educationally middle-class. Mawiyah and her children were in a precarious position, her divorces having jeopardised crucial support, compromising their current lives and impacting upon their ambitions which bridged those of wealthier and less wealthy contemporaries. All six families self-identified as Sunni Muslim; however, they all balanced their faith with elements of secularism and several female family members were practicing Christian or *shi'a* Muslim. Finally, all six families were from regionally diverse backgrounds; all could chart both a long standing connection to Damascus and a pattern of familial migration and peregrination that preceded their settlement in Damascus over the last century.

I spent extended time in the field with these families and their networks, accompanying daily routines and special occasions. Engagement with their specificities provided the basis of many more general observations, allowing me to compare and contrast subtle differences between socio-economic, employment, background and personnel compositions. Accompanying them gave me access to events such as engagements and weddings, and the time spent and loyalty we shared allowed me access to their interpretation of my observations. They also introduced me to a wider network of family and friends who were then often easier to interview and collect life-stories from. Importantly, juxtaposition of detailed life-stories with events occurring during time spent with these families allowed me to compare shifting situated content of narratives and responses as they changed over the time of fieldwork. In this way, an interview was only ever a fragment of what people said and the process of asking again and again often elicited interesting responses, as situations and contexts changed or individuals remembered and emphasised different elements of their lives.

Early on in my fieldwork, I constructed simple household surveys to ask families I visited. These focused on household composition. Very few were ever fully completed as those I spoke to preferred the informality of conversation. Rather, the process was more useful as a way of helping frame more dynamic and responsive questions. Students from the University of Damascus helped me in this process and often, this was more informative about ideas around household composition than the guarded responses I received from the surveys themselves. Other assistance to build up a wider impression of Damascene and Syrian kinship was received from the Syrian Family Planning Association (*Jam'iyya tinthīm al-usra al-Sūriyā*) and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs (*Al-'aīā al-Sūriyā leshu'ūn al-usra*). This included interviewing administrative and medical staff, talking to couples and families attending anti-natal classes and other support services, talking to associated members of parliament and advocates, as well as access to certain official statistics on fertility and family planning access. Much of this data offered a useful background, affirming or sometimes countering trends and attitudes I had experienced through the families I conducted research with. I do not directly refer to the statistical data or institutional practices within this thesis. However, these

institutions were invaluable for the opportunities afforded to access families of both staff and users in the context of a particular generational perspective; entering the realm of hopes, aspiration and prognosis as new possibilities arose in the form of new children.

During the course of my fieldwork I collected 48 life-stories. These were primarily from Damascenes who characterised themselves as older or elderly, typically over fifty years old with grandchildren, whom I will call 'senior'. Five of the life-stories came from those I would categorise as 'wealthy', whose families though not elite *per se* were long-standing residents of Damascus, while another eight came from those I would characterise as 'poor'. These latter individuals were the disadvantaged neighbours, often having suffered family loss such as widowhood, in the mountainside district of Rukn ad-deen.

The definition of life-story is slightly ambiguous since many are much longer than others. Some relied more on my reconstruction from fragments as individuals resisted being confined to narrative conventions. Additional accounts of lives, such as those offered incidentally by taxi-drivers or passing acquaintances, also influence my understanding of how people articulate their lives in time, but remain ethnographic context rather than specific narratives. Methodologically, I used this collection of life-stories for my own direct comparative analysis and importantly as an expression of the past on which other Damascenes could pass comment and analysis (Crapanzano 1984:959). In particular, I focused on life-story collection as the mode of engagement with senior Damascenes, who were perhaps the most mystified by my other research methods and were also in a position to relate the events of their lives with greater depth. I then asked younger Damascenes, especially family members such as children and grandchildren, to comment upon and compare these stories to their current experiences and hopes for the future. In practice, this process often involved young family members listening to the narratives of their senior kin and commenting during or afterwards. Such interviews were far from the calm conversations between interviewer and interviewee imagined before fieldwork. Instead, they contained the cacophonous intersection of various generations together constructing narratives as all involved became simultaneous questioners and narrativisers. At other instances, however, I elicited responses from non-kin Syrians

to recorded or transcribed life-stories to gain another perspective on their content and to stimulate discussion on particular topics such as marriage and property transmission.

Inspired by the work of Annalise Moors on Palestinian women's shifting access to property from 1920-1990 (1995), and in order to contextualise the pasts expressed in life-stories and narratives of past practices, I conducted historical research in the archive centre in Damascus (*Markaz al-wathā'iq al-tārīkhiyya*) which houses records of court proceedings spanning from the Ottoman period to the early 1950s. For this, I employed the help of a translator (who on request remains anonymous) to decipher the handwritten, sometimes Ottoman Arabic and to acquaint me with the forms and etiquettes such documents took.

My intended method here was to extract a sample of marriage contractual documents every five years from the beginning of the 20th century; in practice the remaining archive contents were too patchy and so I collected data from the most complete folios of 1902, 1927 and 1932. Additionally I was able to look briefly at some later example material of marriage contracts for the late 1940s and early 1950s, compiled at the Dar al-Asad Library, affording me an impression of the shifts in contractual documentation despite most post-Independence documents being extremely hard to access. These archival documents were for the most part marriage contracts stipulating age of bride and groom, witnesses and the agreement of financial transactions at the point of marriage. In addition, I also examined court proceedings in the case of divorce, widowhood, disputed alimony and the granting of power of attorney in *sharī'a* courts during the late Ottoman and French Mandate period.

These pieces of archival evidence I collected to compare and give depth to the narrative and historicising accounts offered by Damascenes of their families' experiences, such as accounts of their own and their parents' and grandparents' marriage transactions. I regarded these archival documents ethnographically, curious to understand their contextualised place in relation to my informants' accounts, especially to their life-stories and composite recollections of the past. In this thesis, they are regarded as supporting evidence in my exposition of the historically

constituted changing practices and attitudes around marriage and kinship, but also as material that can be productively juxtaposed with the verbal accounts.

In Moors' careful materialist analysis of changing Palestinian marriage and socio-economic patterns, reminiscences are given some priority in terms of instructive history over legal documents where they show divergence (1995:149). My interest in time, perception and historicity shifts my focus slightly away from diachronic modelling of structural change, towards understanding what work narratives of the past, both verbal and documentary, are doing for my informants in the present. Echoing Koselleck, spoken and documentary narratives are both evidential 'moments' of possible action (([1979] 1985). Consequently, no evidential priority is given to either documentary or verbal accounts of the past. Instead, I regard the tensions and overlaps between them as instructive of the ways contemporary Damascenes understand, utilise and challenge the past.

Ends/beginnings: writing & communication

Constructing the narrative and selecting the data I wished to represent in this thesis depended both on the needs of representation and desires to produce argument. Ethical considerations of 'representation' and access to knowledge are apparent throughout the thesis. Though not explicitly politically charged, the sub-text of my material, the context of its collection in a locale with an insidious regime and my own interpretations mean that some sections of this thesis do offer detailed descriptions of individuals and their views which required thought in handling. Meeting the various wishes of informants for explicit inclusion, partial inclusion, anonymity and/or only implicit inclusion is always a challenge of ethnographic writing. Most names in this thesis have been altered but some have not out of respect for individuals' desires to avoid anonymity. In other contexts, I have taken it as my prerogative not to offer explicit ethnographic description or in very rare instances, to change circumstances and elements beyond just names in order to maintain desired anonymity. Often, this is not because of the political pressures many anthropologists cite, but out of respect for the explicit wishes of my informants. An absence of photographic images of people might be noted and more than anything reflects the profound complications and problems people had with their image being taken and

used indiscriminately, especially given the religious convictions of my informants. That those images were either not taken in the first place or are only for private consumption, speaks to how anthropological findings' 'interactive negotiation' help to shape the constituents of ethics in research practice, rather than being a category or set of tick boxes imposed from other contexts (Harper and Corsin Jiminez 2005).

Temporality, interweaving lives & memory

The problem with time as an analytical category is that potentially it is *everywhere* and *nothing*. The questions anthropologists have asked about time are premised on its intangibility as a dimensional state (Leach 1961:132), requiring a search for it in 'spaces/places' and 'objects/subjects' with the hope of somehow 'capturing' it. The bridal box with which I began this thesis is an object of history and of anthropological curiosity. It has a particular temporal placement, which signifies to me that social change has occurred and is occurring. It also contains, through the possessions it enclosed, a processual 'life-cycle' linked to the marriage, possible childbirth and death of a woman. What analytical and methodological approaches can be brought to bear on this artefact of kinship and its contents? As Bloch (1977) warns, where information is from and where ethnographic evidence is focused instrumentally shapes how time is theorised. Similarly, whether we 'see' linearity or cyclicity depends on the framework of observation, interpretation and the questions we ask (Adam 1995:38). Is it the diachronic mechanisms of social change that my ethnography allows me to comprehend, or is it the synchronic mechanisms by which change and continuity are perceived and lived with? Is it the bridal box which can tell us about Damascene perceptions of time or must we unravel temporality and kinship before we can comprehend the box's meaning? This thesis probes the latter option in both instances, placing the contribution of experience and the modalities of memory and hope, which constitute much temporalising experience, as the central contribution in relation to understandings of temporality. I also suggest that the two are mutual, or rather that the distinction is only useful as a way to model the mechanisms of 'experience' and transformation. All social processes display aspects

of lineality and cyclicity, or diachronic change and synchronic continuity, through practices and the way they are presented (Adam 1995).

This thesis suggests that for my informants, historical time and social structure are entities which alter over time, and considering the meaning of their categories in the present gives us better purchase on the inner relations between particular pasts and futures. To use Koselleck's ([1979] 1985) terms, from the perspective of the 'sense of presence' there are always 'former futures' crafting both the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectations'.

Time, age & mortality: life-cycles or life-courses?

Conventions of measurement and the symbolic structuring of time dominate the anthropological literature that directly or inadvertently addresses temporality (James and Mills 2005:1). Perspectives, which can be glossed as 'social constructivist', complicate notions of time as 'natural' by demonstrating the cultural variability in its calculation and patterning. Early accounts that addressed how time's passage was variously understood considered the ways a society might sustain itself despite the evident change in personnel entailed by birth, aging and mortality (Van Gennep [1908] 1960:3). For Van Gennep, the intangibility of temporality and immediate experience of aging were interlocked and addressed by the wealth of ceremonial and ritual forms which accompany changes in social identity. The schema Van Gennep developed to account for this transition and the militating of its disturbances he termed 'Rite of Passage', which comprised three subsidiary rites: separation; transition; and incorporation. These Van Gennep understood as the spatial realisation of processes of aging, status construction and the experience of time's passage, through his own spatial-structural metaphor, explaining that 'society is similar to a house divided into rooms and corridors' ([1908] 1960:26). This crystallised experiences of moving between roles and their concomitant statuses as analogous to moving through differentiated spaces in a house, meaning that separation was equivalent to leaving one room, and transition like waiting on the threshold of a new room, before entry and incorporation. All life rituals comprised these three details of transformation but the relative emphasis shifted depending on a ritual's place in the individual's life-cycle. Therefore funerals emphasised separation, weddings

incorporation and those linking aging and status with transition, which he termed 'liminal' (Van Gennep ([1908] 1960:21). Though highly schematised and limited in its experiential exploration of time and aging, Van Gennep's model of the marking of stages in the life of persons and groups has been instrumental in connecting time and generation as two sides of the same coin, and therefore offers a useful starting point from which to consider their interaction in my work.

Utilising these insights, East African work on age systems and their epitome 'age-sets' (ritually defined social generations) has explored the contradictions and tensions which may be simultaneously created and alleviated by age- and generation-based hierarchies and divisions of labour (Spencer 1990). Like the models of patriarchy so integral to Middle Eastern kinship theorising, gender and age often entwine to ensure a reified system of power dynamics and clientism. The rites of passage and patterns of residence, comradeship and modes of production they entail give legitimacy and greater appeal by which men ultimately have access to greater personhood (Lewellyn-Davies 1981). The aged and gendered divisions of labour and boundaries of personhood explored by these accounts emphasise the possible alliances set up between cross-gender and cross-generation categories. Such alliances can create apparently antithetical types of ethos between successive age-sets at any one moment, but exactly because of their successive nature these can also act as a learning process for the characteristics necessary to achieve later stages, such as self-control (Spencer 1990). This modelling inverts elements of Mannheim's schema of generational 'conceptualizations of knowledge' by suggesting that it is age itself that mobilises political action, while also being an effect of this power (Hockey and James 2003). Moreover, work by Spencer shows age-sets as, in practice, highly conflicting forms of social organisation, which gain much of their dynamism from their temporariness (1990:15). In an archetypal age-set system such as the Maasai, middle-aged men are the holders of politico-jural power, yet their authority is the outcome of political expedience. Power secured at the cost of older men they have edged out is threatened by challenges from younger men who strive to wrest their power from them. Crucially, at least three generations are accounted for in such models, and consequently each stage is always being re-framed by the others. By creating alliances with newer age-sets and shifting their social focus, older men who

from their immediate juniors' perspective have been 'edged-out', can from their own and those cross-generational alliances they make, gracefully move into another area of concern. These reified systems are often described as highlighting a perception of social time in regard to aging which 'goes in social steps rather than a smooth flow, for it is embedded in the chequered development of social relationships' (Spencer 1990:18). Ethnography also demonstrates that individuals and families employ 'time strategies' as they try to work senses of maturation and shifts of expectation to their advantage (Gulliver 1963). Spencer suggests that it is the clear juxtaposition of different types of aging and generation which asserts social time as a dynamic process (Spencer 1990:19).

The work of Peteet (1994) on shifting male age statuses and the rituals of resistance in the Palestinian *intifāda* illustrates how a model of rites of passage explicates the transformation of abuse at the hands of the Israeli regime, into empirical ground for youths' premature entry into manhood. In so doing, she raises the possibility of other under-explored areas of age and status transition in different circumstances found within the Levant. Her focus on identity, however, means that the temporalising implicit in this model, which bears striking comparisons to East African age-set modelling, remains unaccounted for. In more recent work, Buch (2010) highlights the temporal quality that the distinction between a wife of a detainee or widow of a martyr pivots on, but does not link this gendered positioning back into wider relational logics of temporality and generation.

Along with Hertz who pondered the social construction of mortality and its rituals ([1907] cited in Bloch & Parry 1982), Van Gennep's social constructivist approach framed the life-course, including death, as a continuum divided into sets of internal oppositions. This suggested a view of temporality and generations as being heavily co-implicated categories, defined in terms of their contrasts with one another, their boundaries and limits rather than any essentialised core features. Following this insight, Leach (1961) modelled two modalities of experience, marking alternations between the everyday and the special leading to what might be summarised as 'inversion transgression' where social order was both revealed and maintained by its opposite, as seen for example in carnivals (1961:136). Leach paid greater attention to the bodily experiences and sensations through which these oppositions might be

comprehended. Bodily states such as hunger and tiredness, he suggested, are often manipulated by rituals of transition to create contrasts of need and satisfaction (1961:125). Consequently, the temporal phenomena we can experience, Leach argues, can be classified as those of ‘repetition’, such as the cycle of day and night, and ‘irreversibility’, such as mortality. The latter experience of irreversibility (and presumably its emotional wrench) leads to a resistance to the idea of linearity in time (Leach 1961:124-136). Consequently, what rites of passage do, through schematised oppositions, is to recast that experience; irreversibility can be side-stepped in order to conceptualise endings, growing old and death, through the figurative use of beginnings, birth and growing up. Temporal irreversibility is refuted and the unidirectional nature of the life-course is made cyclical through processes of repetition.

Leach’s formulation echoes and grounds other discussions of time and its perception which focus on the importance of mortality. In his discussions of narrative plot Ricoeur (1979) is inspired by Heidegger’s mode of ‘being-towards-death’ (in ‘Being and Time’ [1927] 1996). Ricoeur’s interpretation of Heidegger asks us to focus on how an experience is directed toward death by virtue of its content or meaning, what Heidegger termed its ‘intentionality’ (1979:20). Whereas historical time is often presented as the layering of events from past to present, this formula frames temporality in terms of anticipation, projecting towards the future at any given moment, yet shot through by the facts of what has passed previously (Heidegger [1927] 1996:331). Of relevance here is the emphasis on the ‘future’ as the primary phenomenon of time. Applying this insight anthropologically, we can consider whether people reckon and calculate time because they are aware of their own mortality (Ricoeur 1979:26). Consequently the manner of reckoning time most salient to my informants may be heavily entwined with the manner, religiously prescribed or otherwise, in which death and its after-effects are framed (Gell1992:265). In this way, Leach’s formulation of making the irreversible manageable through cyclisation can be contrasted with the desire for linearity and eternity through afterlife. Recasting life’s finitude as a repetitive life-cycle may be one of many ways that mortality and temporality are co-constituted. Addressed in this thesis are several interpretations offered by my Damascene informants of what

mortality means and what happens after death, as it was clearly an integral facet of how they thought about time and the choices they made. The manner this was expressed reminds me to consider potentiality and what, following Ricoeur (1979; 1980), I term implicit ‘intentionality’ and explicit ‘intentions’, as not being limited to ‘this world’ in accord with my informants’ religiosity. Comparing a ‘social constructivist’ analysis with philosophical considerations highlights the way temporal presumptions are inherent in how we conceptualise the individual’s existence. The terms life-cycle and life-course contain implicit models. In this thesis, I follow my informants’ emphasis on continuation rather than recycling, by using the term life-course to suggest ‘the passage of a lifetime less as the mechanical turning of a wheel and more as the unpredictable flow of a river’ (Hockey and James 2003:5).

‘Big moments’

Following Van Gennep, Turner (1967) develops the concept of rites of passage towards exploring the fluidity of entire networks or matrices of social relationships, saying ‘whatever society we live in we are all related to one another; our own “big moments” are “big moments” for others as well (1967:7). This is a key insight into the way the life-course can be understood as a trajectory plotted ‘relationally’ in terms of approximations towards, and distancing from, other members (Harris 1987:20). Turner’s focus is in the creative or transformative functions of rituals; the manner in which they produce the social rather than merely projecting it. This is a perspective Bloch and Parry (1982) extend with their discussion of the symbols of fertility and rebirth in funeral rituals. It is useful because it suggests a model which is more than just a static, unending recycling of human beings, that engenders a concomitant understanding of temporality. Focusing on the central ‘liminal’ zone of Van Gennep’s schema, Turner considers how material forms work, symbolically, to produce change. He argues that the state of ambiguity which liminality creates is where the creative potential of a ritual and society resides (1967:110). Importantly, while the inter-structural period may stand in stark contrast with the structures of the mundane social world, it also contains within it the seeds of that structure, exactly because the symbols themselves are ambiguous; rules and roles of social structure

are inverted or put in abeyance. For Turner, this means that individuals engage with one another more directly, entering into what he calls 'communitas'. The experience of liminality, therefore, is not just about repetition and reinforcement; it contains the seeds of change exactly because it allows for 'the central values and axioms' of the culture to be 'scrutinised' (1969:156).

Turner's work tells us about the structuring of experience but is limited in its discussion of what experience is itself (Hockey and James 2003:54). As Seremetakis (1991) remarks, it is assumed 'ritual is an event separated in time and space from other domains of social practice, and thus marked by explicit beginnings and endings' (1991:47). From her work on death in Inner Mani, Greece, Seremetakis emphasises an alternative processual ritualisation which 'resituates it within the flux and contingency of everyday events' (1991:47). By conceptualising ritual as an ongoing process of change, adjustment and meaning-making, she investigates the interrelationship of socially located individuals as they participate in mutual processes of time and aging. Similarly, Munn's concerns with 'lived time', and how space and time fold into each other, lead her to see time as a 'symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices' (Munn 1992:116). It is, she argues, through daily practices such as eating and toilet training, that time is socialised and embodied (Munn 1983:280). These later works free us from considering only formal rituals, allowing exploration of the ways in which ambiguities encouraging the scrutinisation of society occur and are experienced through wider temporal and generational constellations.

Just as Leach reflects Heideggerian insights into time and mortality, Turner's notion of 'communitas' resonates with Arendt's philosophical concern with the mode of human togetherness, or 'plurality' ([1958] 1998:7-8). Arendt distinguishes three fundamental categories of 'being in the world' which counterpoint Heidegger's focus on death; 'labour', 'work' and what she terms 'action'. Labour, the basic practical provision of human sustenance, and work, the effort and products of which constitute memorialising contributions that extend beyond an individual's lifespan, help to differentiate and highlight the place of 'action' as a novel force (Arendt [1958] 1998). Arendt's action is made distinct as the only activity between men that occurs without external mediation, and accords with 'plurality' where it can be harnessed

for a pure kind of politics and fundamental widespread transformative work. Arendt appeals to an anthropological argument by describing plurality as ‘the fact that men, not man, live on the earth and inhabit the world’ and explaining plurality as a result of the perpetual novelty of new human beings ([1958] 1998:7-8). By appealing to the uniqueness and intertwining of human beings, Arendt suggests that action is unpredictable because it is a manifestation of ‘freedom’, of the capacity to innovate and to alter situations by engaging in them. Because it takes place within the web of human relationships, no actor has the power to control the consequences of their deeds, meaning action is irreversible; it is both a reaction and a fresh source of future deeds. For Arendt, this irreversibility is not primarily premised on mortality but on ‘natality’, by which she means the capacity to begin, to do something new and possibly unexpected (Arendt [1958] 1998:8-9). This condition of natal ‘potential’, which allows action such as social or political change, is dependent on a plurality of working actors who from their different perspectives can each judge the quality of what is being enacted (Arendt [1958] 1998:178).

The existence of action and its judgement are dependent on an ability to ‘disclose’ an identity for the enacting agent (Arendt [1958] 1998:73-78, Ricoeur 1979:32-3). An example of Arendt’s formulation of action and disclosure, coupled with Turner’s emphasis on ambiguity, is offered by Jean-Klein (2000) in her discussion of attempts to build a Palestinian state through the organisation and activity of young men, their subsequent detention and beating, and the way this evidence was projected during the first *intifāda* (2000:102). She argues that young men’s ambiguous relation to patriarchal control and its reproduction (always potential but not yet realised) made them ‘eminently suitable’ to carry out the ‘action’ of the transformation of Palestinian society, accompanying the ascent of an independent nation-state (2000:122). However, crucial to her argument is that the transformative action of young men was dependent on its subsequent narrative and physical disclosure by mothers and sisters. Moreover, it relied on the temporality of ‘the moment’, political and familial; on the young men who personified potential patriarchal control, yet in the immediate present, offered an embodied challenge to patriarchal authority (specifically their fathers’) (2000:119). Notably, the

transformative action in this context differs from that defined by Arendt, being mediated as it was by female kin.

Social change and familial instrumentality are often modelled in terms of dialectics, but Turner and Arendt's insistence on 'communitas' and 'plurality' combined with Jean-Klein's discussion of the place of the family and the interlocking life-courses offers the possibility of thinking beyond models which intentionally or inadvertently prioritise duality.

A sense of presents: multiple modalities of temporality

Heeding Bloch's (1977) advice against uncritically conflating time with the processes which happen in it, more recent work has explored the 'convergences of 'time' as patterned in ongoing representations and social practice... and the way that events are produced as they happen' (James and Mills 2005:1). This has prompted questions about how embedded ideas and practices marking time affect potential actions and outcomes.

Most anthropological explorations of time, past and recent, try to comprehend the ways in which time '*becomes* salient' in human affairs (Gell 1992:315). For many, this opens the possibility of multiple temporalities operating simultaneously and fulfilling different functions (Evans-Pritchard 1939, 1940; Bloch 1977), yet the significance of this seeming plurality of temporality has proven harder to theorise and fashion into any kind of consensus of terminology. For example, Evans-Pritchard makes a distinction between 'ecological time' determined by the Nuer's daily interaction with their landscape and seasonality, 'structural time' geared towards organisational forms of social structure, specifically genealogy, and his own regimented 'clock time'. Yet this schema and his inferences only map uneasily onto Gell's model of a reified distinction in 'time anthropology' between a subjective, durational and flexible time (A series) and time as an objective, abstracted construct of mathematical reasoning (B series), despite being in part derived from Evans-Pritchard's prior modelling (1992:15-22).

Following Bloch, Gell asks us to focus our attention on what is done by people in 'real time', rather than only the ways they represent things through rituals. Action is not a phenomenon simply of 'the present'; it is part of an anticipated flow

leading to 'the future'. In this vein, Gell prescribes that an ethnographer should not seek out the 'concepts of time'; instead they should focus on the choices people make about how they will spend their day or periods of the immediate future with regard to the 'opportunity-costs' facing them. In other words, time is volitional, future-oriented and calculated in its structure. This 'allocationist' model is compelling because it asks us to seek time in the practices and choices of day-to-day life, to consider 'inherent choreographical possibilities of social action in their space-time frame' (1992:325). I take this as an encouragement to explore tangible shifts and perceived changes in social life as evaluated in context. Specifically, to ask questions such as what is it to be a bride or a parent in Damascus 'now' in relation to 'then' and 'will'?

James and Mills (2005) correctly point out the limitations of Gell's approach, suggesting that it contains serious presumptions about the 'work ethic' of people's actions and neglects the possible pluralities of notions of time (2005:4) which are so well charted in the ethnographic record. As historian E.P Thompson's influential piece 'Time, Work, Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' ([1967] 2007) suggests, this ordering and focusing of temporality and practice is an artefact of historical transformation and confluence of modes of production. This insight has emphasised for anthropologists that time is experienced in relation to our possibilities. Tempered by the historical specificity explored by historians such as Thompson ([1967] 2007) and Koselleck ([1979] 1985), Gell's approach does allow us to talk about the ways choices are made and volition is exercised in a context shaped by both the past and by aspirations of the future. Bringing Gell's focus on action as situated and anticipated in time to the fore, pushes us to confront what he cannot; that history is always 'in the making', and expectations generated by the conventional time structures of shared life can shape major events. As James and Mills point out, 'Events may follow conventional representations of time, but reciprocally, representations – including unorthodox expectation – can precipitate events.' (2005:2).

The contradiction between subjectivity and the sharedness of temporality, however, dogs Gell's notions of volition and action in time. Any subjective, durational senses of time (A series), he argues, must ultimately be navigated by

internal ‘intellectual reconstructions’ of an ‘abstract’ understanding of time (1992:318-20). Overly reified notions of durational subjective time and its divisions from regulated time preclude inter-subjectivity and the fundamental reciprocities of perspective by denying any manner of communication or possibility to model ‘the other’. Thus the ‘intention’ of actions and practices are lost if we make too strong a distinction between subjective and abstract ‘time’. Where Gell’s point requires greater elaboration is the role played by memory and the need to question models of ‘other’ and ‘self’ which are used for this reciprocity. Because Gell does not attend to memory or history or the specificity of what it is to model self and other temporally, he is happy to dismiss ‘experience’ as ‘only mediatory’ (1992:320). This downplays his earlier points and those of Bloch’s about the place of what they call ‘practical’ tasks (Bloch 1977; Gell 1992), which I take to mean things like the processes of daily and longer-term sustenance such as food and shelter provision, in relations of wider notions of social action. Or to frame it in Arendt’s schema ([1958] 1998), how labour becomes work and how work becomes or shapes action.

Arendt notes that it is the very plurality of human existence that is both the condition for and purpose of action ([1958] 1998:7, 176). My ethnography suggests that the divisions Arendt makes between labour (basic practical provision), work (memorialising contributions that extend beyond an individual humans lifespan) and action (where plurality can be harnessed for a pure kind of politics and fundamental widespread transformative work) are only relevant if we consider how one becomes or shades into the other; labour to work and work to action. Moreover, I contend that one concrete example of this type of plurality and reciprocity of perspectives where both Arendt’s and Gell’s considerations of action might be found is in the generations within kinship. But as soon as we consider multiple generations interacting in social history, life-courses distinct but interacting, imbued with and using experience, memory and hope, we must both contend with the inter-subjectivity of temporality, its sharedness *and* with the different dispositions it engenders.

To re-iterate, what an overview of discussions of time in anthropology suggests is that theoretical approaches and ethnographic examples reveal a conundrum; a plurality of time models might exist at once, in some senses pointing

to the subjectiveness of time rather than its absolutism, yet these models for the most part can only exist if they are shared. For example, when Buch (2010) cogently argues that it is through difference in modes of temporality that the categories of Palestinian wives of martyrs and wives of detainees can be fully comprehended, she has to brush over the wider implications of the ‘connectivity’ and inter-subjectivity her work relies on (2010: 92, 95). Instead, what her work does suggest is that there are those who might find themselves in some respects ‘out of time’ or in the wrong time and therefore limited in their ‘action’. This reiterates Leach’s observations about the contrasting qualities on which understandings of time are often premised (1961:126). In this thesis, I attend to the different scaling of temporality as it is framed by my informants inter-subjectivity, their explicit concerns and the intentionality of their actions.

Memory, experience & historicisation

In Damascus, time appears most salient as an instrument for and artefact of memory, narrative and historicisation, which are often indistinguishable and co-constituted in this thesis. It is the points at which they appear divergent or conflicted, be it through individuals disagreeing, or in a wider sense through their forms, aims and outcomes, which are often the most instructive for understanding social transformation and temporality in and through the lives of those I spoke to. Invariably, time and its signifiers are politically and/or religiously inflected. Genres of the macro, global and meta-narratives of history jostle alongside those of the divine or daily life. Tacit in the work of many anthropologists on time, memory and history is the relationship between *becoming* and *being* (Hockey and James 2003:5). Though this thesis is primarily anthropological, I have found it fertile to reflect on how key insights into questions of experience, intentionality and potentiality are woven into memories. As Koselleck suggests, by considering experience as a category we can join the conditions of possible temporality and history with the conditions of their comprehension ([1979] 1985:267). Linked to the experience which produces them, memory is a practice which then reshapes experience, reminding us to consider the uses, invocations and work of memory (Antze and Lambek 1996; Carsten 2007).

Anthropological work suggests that memory provides both the implicit, phenomenological grounds and explicit, reflexive means, for identity construction (Antze and Lambek 1996:xvi). Considerations of memory as temporally situated suggest ambiguity in its very role in identity construction, from that of the individual to the politics of nationhood. As Antze and Lambek attest, if ‘the past is in one sense determinate of who we are, it provides in another sense inversions of our present sense’ (1996:xvi). Similarly, regardless of scale, from familial cross-subjectivity to nation-states, memory can be a locus of struggle over the boundary between the individual and the collective or distinct groups in which power becomes the operative factor (Boyarin 1994). Recent discussions of kinship and memory have highlighted that memory and aging can act as a significant resource, through which individuals construct biographies across the life-course (Lamb 2000, Vitebsky 2005). In kinship it is often through memory work that implicit and intrinsic possibilities, our potentiality, produce controls on the world, by shaping the terms and conditions of acceptable behaviour and experience (Bloch 1996).

Experience is utilised in constructing and limiting orientation within the families I discuss in this thesis. When considering social practices and ‘experience’ with time depth it is hard not to draw a distinction, between ‘experience’ as a phenomenological activity (what it is like to experience something) and its more abstracted relative, ‘experience’ as a corollary of knowledge and possibly wisdom (knowing from past experience). In colloquial Damascene Arabic, a distinction is also made between *ṣār ma’* (*colloq.*) (to experience/to happen) as in ‘this is a new experience,’ *khābra* (*colloq.*) (having experience) as in ‘I know from experience’, *ḥādsa* (*colloq.*) or *qaṣ-ṣa* (*colloq.*) (to have experience) as in ‘I had a strange experience’ and *mḥannak* (*colloq.*) (to be experienced) as in ‘He is very experienced’. Although I do not place a strong emphasis on linguistic forms, given that ‘experience’ can be expressed in a multitude of ways beyond the verbal, these distinctions often served to clarify what ‘experience’ was being discussed without the ambiguities of English. As discussions of memory illustrate, ‘Experiences overlap and mutually impregnate one another’ (Koselleck [1979] 1985:275) and in this thesis it is often through memory that notions of experience are elided and played with to various effect.

It is these ambiguities of memory and experience through which I seek the significance temporality has for my Damascene informants. In contexts of remembrance, the structure of temporal and experiential forms can be explored; their explicit intentions (directly explicable purpose) and implicit intentionality (directedness of experience toward things in the world). Linking experience with shifting historical time, Koselleck argues that against a chronological order all experience leaps over time and therefore does not create continuity in the sense of an additive preparation of the past. Arguing ‘What is expected of the future is evidently limited in a manner different from which it has been experienced in the past’ ([1979] 1985:273) draws attention to the dynamic between experience and expectation. Experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered; expectation is the future made present. They do not mutually relate to the past and future. Koselleck argues that tension between experience and expectation brings about new resolutions and this generates historical time. Thus historical time is not just some inert, amorphous lineality, it is created and is generative through action. If we take seriously temporality, we can consider feelings of restriction, which already presuppose the new horizon of expectations (Koselleck [1979] 1985). A society’s ‘long conversation’ can be seen through the dissimilar modes of existence, from whose tension historical time can be inferred.

The intersection between memory, kinship and historicisation is given substance by Bloch’s discussion (1996) of the place of internal and external memory through the different ways of ‘being in history’ that can be inferred from interacting models of knowledge and experience transmission, reproduction and memorial. In the Middle East, the memory and time of genealogies dominate anthropological accounts, often tacitly reflecting elements of Evans-Pritchard’s discussion (1936; 1940) of ‘structural time’ or time that relates to society itself through age sets. Ultimately, this focuses on the calculus of relationships embodied in and through lineage and this conception of relationships according to a temporal framework means that past explains present and *vice-versa*. Thus in recent work on the Balga of Jordan, Shryock (1997) illustrates moments of collapsed time that juxtapose with over-arching genealogies of power, placing families in formal historical time through descent lines.

This is, however, a static model, or at least what Koselleck calls ‘static mobility’ ([1979] 1985:22), where memory and the past can only be experienced through what is to come (and *vice-versa*). Though this may reflect a certain orientation towards memory, time and historicisation, it also negates the ‘work’ and ‘action’ that is being attempted and achieved through persons as receptacles of kinship, memory and time. It is again a limited integration with the activities people do and the meaning with which they ascribe these activities, along with the striking lack of emphasis in the case of Shryock (1997) (and perhaps his informants) on notions of the hereafter and place of God. The ‘intention’ of actors contained within these accounts becomes subsumed in the repeatability of the model and loses sight of the possibilities they are trying to convey and harness through memory work. While the Sadah and the Balga may encompass some form of externally unchanging notions of reified transmission, maintained by mnemonic devices, with internally unchanged potential for fulfilling, its transmission through reproduction and descent (Bloch 1996:221), it is clear that this cannot solely account for the diversity of Middle Eastern communities and their memorial, historicising interactions with social change.

What these examples do suggest is that it is worth taking seriously any elective affinity between emic views of informants’ places in history and their theories of kinship. As Carsten (2007) suggests, memories and histories not only ‘toe the line’, they can also offer alternative scenarios which reveal the perceived restrictions and impositions of kinship and familial life (Carsten 2007:12). What are reified accounts of genealogy and their concomitant rhetorics doing in relation to alternative conceptions of time, kinship and change?

Composite stories: telling, capturing & retelling narratives

Presented in this thesis are accounts of life stories and events, often told from various angles. Methodologically, interview transcripts are not prioritised as a form of evidence. Rather, they are seen as one element of a wider context of Damascene sociality, as events situated in time and space. Forms of communication, in particular verbal narratives and life-stories, are an integral part of the presented data and

analysis. These expressions require careful consideration and the use of some theoretical tools to analyse their implications (Crapanzano 1984). Following Gilsenan, 'narrative' is the primary term I use to describe the verbal accounts Damascenes presented of remembered events in a variety of singular, braided or fraying ways (1996:32). Narrative, rather than discourse, is focused on for one dominant reason: time. As Ricoeur (1979, 1980) suggests, narrative is a form that expresses temporality through the medium of plot, by which he means the drawing together of events that may be more or less sequential in order to impart meaning, especially causal meaning, through language (1979:24). Although I am interested in the power relations inherent in communication, it is the manner by which time is perceived, expressed and transmitted which shapes my approach. Ricoeur brings awareness of how narrative activity provides privileged access to the way the experience of time is articulated, as significant wholes are construed out of events that may be more or less scattered in time and space (2004:243). Narrative and plot, however, can only be realised via the art of telling, be it as a written form or, as is my primary concern, as a verbal (and occasionally non-verbal/active/sensual) expression. Hence, narrative time can be seen at the very least as a form of public time, reciprocally creating narratives as events in themselves (Ricoeur 1980:175), but what this means to Damascenes must be explored. In this way, narratives are treated as events or processes within the ethnography I present rather than as discrete entities or abstract sequences of events.

The shop proprietor's lament about his errant relatives in the introduction illustrates many ethnographic encounters and narratives in the field which were not only commentary on events that impinged on peoples' lives, but also events in themselves. Even when I had initiated informal interviews or questioning, there were often periods when I was unsure if I or others were the primary audience. As in the narrative of the missing money and suspect car, the primary speaker was rarely 'alone' in the account-giving; those around continuously interrupted and layered upon the primary speakers' account corrections, elaborations and questions. Thus the 'dialogic' character (Bakhtin 1981) of much of the material presented in this thesis, where a narrative is produced by multiple speakers each of whose discourse is generated in context and in response to others. Moreover, the aim of eliciting

response from others is considered as a subject of study, in other words the process of dialogue as it is refracted through past, present and future concerns. Throughout the thesis, I return to the insights of Bakhtin (1981) to help contextualise and explore not only the content of narratives and stories offered to me but to also consider their ‘dialogic’, plural view and ‘monologic’, single view, character and ‘addressivity’ (Bakhtin 1981:270-2; Hill 1986:92; Holquist 1990). Not only are narratives events in their own right that express ‘public time’, they are also always directed to some hearer and intended to be received¹. As Bakhtin illustrates, narratives are produced in a processual dialogue with social others; they are also populated with the intentions of others (1981:293). By focusing on utterances as a form of exchange and employing a metaphor from language, dialogue, Bakhtin seeks to explore the production of action and persons through the processes of language (Hill 1986; Bruner and Gorfain 1988). Influenced by this insight, Basso (1988; 1996) has shown how in Apache place stories, narrative has become a powerful corrective for errant behaviour, both modifying a person’s future actions (by reshaping a self) and reconstituting Apache tradition. Basso’s analysis overlaps with Gilsenan’s assertions (1996) about the moral integrity, messages and effects of Lebanese narratives of violence. Both suggest that the meaning of a given story is the construction posited in a particular telling by socially positioned persons at given historical moments. This recognition allows us to ask what might be the bounds and limits of narrative interpretation, and what we can learn from the reaches of interpretation and their stopping points. I present the intentions inherent in Damascene addressivity, intrinsic to the narrative’s content and words, extrinsic with the narrative’s historical context, and experiential as the narrative is addressed and received at a given moment (Bruner and Gorfain 1988). In other words, the focus is placed on what narratives can and cannot do as they are put to use in any given moment in Damascus.

An array of authors focusing on the Middle East have highlighted the importance of what Jean-Klein coins ‘narrative-action’ (2001:84). Speech utterances and acts of narration have been variously foregrounded as sites of power that are crucial to understanding the political and socio-cultural ‘character’ of the region.

¹ On this occasion I was part of the context but I suspected that my presence was an ancillary bonus to a discussion that was already underway, giving the narration more dimensions.

Arabic is more than a language; it is a potent trope that ‘unites’ the region, some argue artificially, and is the ‘nimbus and cement’ (Salameh 2010:xiii) of Arabness (an identity derived from the shared language as much as geography and culture) and (pan)Arabist sentiment. It is also the language of the Qur’an and revered for its sophistication and its place as the language of heaven. As opposed to classical Arabic, the spoken language comes in a plethora of dialects and forms that are the medium of everyday communication. Arabic and its fellow languages have been expressed as analytically instrumental as the medium in which other tropes such as ‘honour and shame’ operate. For example, Bourdieu’s (1965; 1977) concepts of challenge and riposte, which prefigure both regional literature and his wider insights into the relation between action and structure, led to his formulation of an analytics of practices. More recently, language and utterance have been regarded as integral to the discourses through which Islamic praxis, subjecthood and its discontents are enacted (Asad 1993; Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2006). This sort of attention to language (utterance, dialogue, listening, narrative) has offered anthropologists the opportunity to engage with parallel work in the disciplines that make up regional studies and vice-versa, incorporating the important written and literary traditions of Islam and the Middle East (see Starr 1992; Messick 1996).

In Damascus, Salamandra argues that there is ‘no absolute distinction between discourse and practice... social and cultural life takes place in and through language’ (2004:23-24) and others stress the concurrence of ‘saying’ and ‘doing’ (Reedy 2006:10). This speaks to the potency of language in a variety of forms in Damascus. It does not, however, explain why ‘narrative’ forms are such an active social agent. Discussing the substantive meshing of committee movements of houses through their socialities and personnel during the first Palestinian *intifāda*, Jean-Klein suggests that some subjects and subject combinations (male committee member and female committee member/ brother and sister) would become ‘twice active’ (2003:561). The manner of distinguishing committee and house activities to make the same subjects ‘twice-active’ was ‘through performatory speech utterances’ (2003:561). Here, the spoken or narrative element was the facilitator of action. It is action but it does not automatically stand alone, and is contingent on the way the activity is its own reward.

Similarly, Gilsenan emphasises the importance of understanding any given narrative in relation to the narrator and their position in the narrative landscape of 1970s northern Lebanon (1996). Reciprocally integral to hierarchy and power is the ‘power to speak and narrate one’s own changing or unchanging place in the world’ (1996:xiii). Being part of the master narrative signals status and the narrative itself, through acts of telling, re-affirms hierarchy. Acts, in particular violent acts, become part of a narrative chain of events that feed back into action; ‘Enacted stories motivate and animate the social processes of which they are an integral part’ (1996:57). It is not simply that narratives are told about social actions but that structures of social life are, in some instances, informed by this pervasive narrative logic. They must correspond in deeds and motive to moralising ideas about human action and, as such, make a causally coherent plot. Through his examination of the shifting social patterns of socio-economic change among the highly stratified population, from Beys (Lords) to Aghas (henchmen and managers) to Fellahin (peasants), he not only highlights the structural power differentials encapsulated in narratives about the elite, but also demonstrates that it is not enough to presume all narrative is action or that all action can be narrativised (1996). Instead, we are made aware of the subtleties of types of narration, forms of expressive story-telling and the realms of narrative possibility at any given moment. The rhetorics of masculinities, their limits and their ‘comic realities’ are presented here as jostling and negotiating through the changing context of Lebanese politics, mechanisation and personal contingencies of family reproduction. Through the concept of male virtue, Gilsenan here alludes to the heroes and structures of Homeric epics, which resonate through concepts such as honour and violence (1996:57). He also draws parallels between ‘heroic society’ and his field-site of Akkar, where the art of narrating deeds was as integral to their social action as the deeds themselves.

This type of comparison between the Levantine social practice and story-telling forms is notably widespread in the anthropological literature. Wedeen (1999) sees analogies with Aesopian fable when discussing the creation of tolerated forms of public critique for the Hafiz Asad regime of 1990s Syria (1999:88). For Damascus, Salamandra (2004) uses Jane Austin as a comparator to help paint an image of elite Damascene society (2004: 55, 69), while Linsdisfarne (2000) found

that her ethnographic research in the city could not be expressed in traditional anthropological writing styles and instead opted to convey her material in a series of short stories. Why do these authors feel compelled towards such narrative comparisons and literary allusions from their fieldwork experiences, and what prevents them from using more direct/conventional forms of comparison?

One answer to these questions that pervades this thesis is the intense evidence of ‘heteroglossia’ and the power relations that define all arts of communication and defy straightforward presentation. This, it seems, is one push for authors to wish to convey both the narrativity of social life - the pull for sociality to fit within moral narratives rules as identified by Gilsenan - and the ‘dialogical’ character of regional expression. Bakhtin (1981) used ‘heteroglossia’ to express the product of a ‘unitary language’ with centripetal pull towards consistency operating in the midst of a diversity of dialects, vernaculars, registers and genres at any particular historical period (Hill 1986:89). The power stratification inherent in unitary language, the speech arts and genres that it engenders such as rhetoric, inevitably create different voices in time and space which offer a counter centrifugal force to a languages unity. Rather than being polarised from a unitary language, the term heteroglossia conveys a locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide, where every context creates conditions which govern the meaning of speech. In Damascus, this is perhaps most evident through the hierarchy of language registers and genres that must be negotiated. For example, as a non-Arab/Middle Easterner, most Damascenes presumed I could not speak Arabic and if I could, that it would be a formal generic Arabic rather than local Damascene/Syrian dialect. Speaking the Damascene colloquial ‘*‘āmmiyya shuwāmī*’ was for the most part like having a heavy curtain opened to discover it is a glorious day outside. Individuals became less guarded and especially with less wealthy families, their relief was palpable. Yet if little old ladies congratulated me on my grasp of domestic terms and expressive phrases, many wealthier individuals, especially men, seemed irritated at my lopsided grasp of Arabic(s) and lack of fluency with formal Arabic’s extensive vocabulary. A child of one of the families I spent time with commented that I knew many people who ‘spoke like a book’, combining admiration and derision in one observation. Such are the layers of power dynamics of language, spoken and written, and the ambiguities of

the arts of narration. As an anthropologist, I had to make ongoing decisions about the systems of linguistic norms I prioritised while conducting fieldwork.

Throughout this thesis, I use Bakhtin's understanding of heteroglossia and the inherent tensions between dialogism versus monologism as a springboard from which to understand the different registers expressed by my informants as defined by time and space, and continually contingent on the emergent circumstances around them. Bakhtin brings to the fore the way that the address of any given voice is shaped by its reception, reminding us that speech is produced in multiple conversations past and future, and offering a textured model for considering the expression of time in narratives and dialogue (1981:282). Bakhtin's insights afford me a way to order and express the meaning not just of narratives and utterances, but why one individual agreed or differed from another and why sometimes, individuals and groups would differ not only from the narrative accounts of others but also from their own earlier accounts.

Plot, process, meaning and context are the focus of my consideration of Damascene narratives. Narratives are replete with ambiguity and paradox – this can be the consequence of bringing together disparate events into a significant whole or the result of conflicting and dissident voices. Yet evidence suggests that monologic certitude and semiotic openness can co-exist. For example, Gilsenan illustrates how a powerful figure can create narrative by force but still cannot define its future meaning (1996:36). Bakhtin discusses language as a process of 'historical becoming' (1981:288), which Bruner and Gorfain (1988) suggest is a dialogue between autobiography and history as each person is aligned with a prevailing cultural tradition. From their work on the Israeli archaeological site of Masada, they suggest that the experiential aspect of dialogic narration is that the returning to events is expressed not just with the story but rather with personal experience (1988:6). This then makes an event relevant and personalised to an individual's life situation, and in this way the meaning held within the dialogic narrative is individualised and culture becomes autobiography (1988:73). Thus the historical is inserted into the individual's personal narrative. However, I argue beyond this that through the tensions presented by Bakhtin in terms of dialogic and monologic, Damascenes not only insert their lives into an historical discourse, they are also instrumental in

actively creating historical change. Resonances exist between narrative, action and temporality. This thesis attempts not to conflate them but to explore the relationships between their forms and how they are perceived. I aim for my own narrative description of the fine grain of temporal and generational dynamics.

Sensual meanings: perceiving Damascene time

Considering the preservation and heritage machinations of Damascus' Old City in relation to the distinction and kinship patterning of the elite, Salamandra (2004) describes a relationship to the material past fraught with politicking and ambivalence. In the material from less wealthy Damascenes, I present artefacts such as the bridal box and places such as homes and even nations as having a shifting, often politically inflected quality which disrupts any preconceptions about the solidity of the material past. Objects and property thread through the kinship accounts I present, yet it is their transience rather than permanence which comes to the fore. Family photographs are destroyed, homes are lost or cannibalised, marriage prestations like the bridal box and *mahr* appear ambiguous with changing semantic possibilities, names in passports are altered and even the anchoring connections of recipes and sharing food contain ephemerality. This fragility and changeability is in part a product of exploring time and historicisation (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990). Regardless of Damascus' antiquity, we cannot be surprised when considering perceptions of social change if change is what is encountered in and through the material evidence of people's lives. It does however, also point to the need to take seriously what these types of transience in things and places reveals and how it can best be grappled with. By indicating that the material of culture is not fixed, but inherently transitive, I argue that it is understood as demanding connection, completion and extension by the perceiver.

Problems with materiality/immateriality & sensuous solutions

Through his work on Jordanian Bedouin protective amulets, Bille (2010) demonstrates that understanding of ambivalence towards material objects requires an exploration of their sensual capacities and sense logics which determine their uses.

Bille argues that for his informants, absence is not conflated with “the immaterial”, as all are subject to ambiguous classifications and experiences. Focusing on luminosity, Bille and Sørensen (2007) emphasise social orchestration of experiencing matter as bodily sensation. Light, they argue, is more than just a medium; it evokes agency (2007:264). In Jordan, it is a way of creating and safeguarding a ‘moral space’ as part of a technique of hospitality, by revealing and orchestrating space and by extension the reputation of the family (Bille and Sørensen 2007:278). The active manipulation of sensory conditions highlights the specificity and political inflection of particular contexts. As in Jordan, the aesthetics of light are employed in Damascus in complex and composite ways, from hospitality to the glittering clothes and make-up of wedding guests. The use of bright lighting identified by Bille and Sørensen to create ‘moral space’ is here made ambiguous by past forms of domestic lighting and ongoing forms of political detainment. Historical Damascene architecture employs light to great effect, in homes and in public spaces such as *ḥammām sūqs*. The contrast with fluorescent strip lighting employed in modern homes, offices and many public spaces such as restaurants and cafes is something my Damascene informants were as aware of as I. These bright lights marked modernity and for some they also had resonance with the current political state of affairs. Practices of detention and imprisonment by the state were often portrayed as involving the continuous presence of naked electric light, sometimes for months on end, making sleep almost impossible (see Cooke 2007). The use of this light in day-to-day life reflected for some the continuous presence of a police state and signified the imprisoning nature of all life in contemporary Syria. The politics of light, its manipulation and its perceived meaning were manifold and this suggests that the ongoing historicising and political nature of sensory constellations of persons, objects, spaces and their qualities must be taken into account.

Calling attention to the ambiguous relationship between people, things and places, warns against presuming the isomorphism of space/places and objects with time, in my considerations of temporality (Hodges 2008). Instead, in this thesis I emphasise the particular sensuous engagements with things, which hold their own instrumentality for my informants and emphasise the dense and embodied communication between, persons, things and experience (Appadurai 1986). Weiner

and Schneider (1988:1-29) approach textiles as a surface where collective norms, values and codes are deposited by social institutions and subsequently recovered for ideological mobilisation. Similarly, I see objects and places as the surfaces on which temporality, generation and kinship may be inscribed. At points, these surfaces and inscriptions are also akin to or simply are substances of kinship. By substances, I mean the processual terms by which persons are constituted with people and things through their relations with others and as such they are integral to processes of personification and cross-subjectivity between kin (Carsten 2004). Consequently I use it to highlight or help explicate patterns of transmission and personification in the Damascene kinship I describe. For my informants the bounds of processes for personification and kinship are not, I would suggest, determined by objects or matter *per se*. Following Seremetakis (1996:216), I suggest that it is instead sensory reciprocity that can be utilised for instrumental ends such as making and growing family members. Thus, in the context of the kinship I describe, sensory and material means are utilised in the inscribing of indentity on younger kin over time which leads to the ‘materialization of the person and the personification of matter’. This reiterates that it is often the contemporary currency inscribed on an object or place, conveyed through sensory reciprocity, which contextualises that object in time and history.

Recontextualisation is one of the primary concerns for Appadurai (1986) when he discusses the life-history of the object and how it can pass in and out of diverse regimes of valuation (1986:48). Thus objects, and the senses they are tangled with, might shift in and out of focus, as the bridal box has lost its earlier currency and gained another. However, Appadurai does not explore how the shifting valuation and disarticulation of the object from earlier identities, through its accumulated biography, then impacts on the social memories and identities of persons that were carried and discarded along with the artefact as it undergoes revaluation. In order to do this, suggests Seremetakis, we need to take seriously how intrinsic perceptual qualities of objects express their sensory history, and how this salience can motivate and animate their exchange and shared consumption (1996:134).

In their work on age and aging, Hockey and James (2003:54) argue that the body and its capacities are often ignored as the conditions of and the location for the experience of changed and changing identities. This raises questions of how material

performance deposits narratives on bodies, social spaces and artefacts as palpable surfaces of historical depiction. Yet, in line with Bille's observations, the sensory is not only encapsulated within the body as an internal capacity or power (2010). As suggested, it is dispersed on the surfaces of things as autonomous characteristics, which then can invade the body as perceptual experience (Seremetakis 1996). This offers one avenue of approaching the challenge of capturing the movement of history through a shifting perceptual focus. Considering changing socio-sensual relationships to things like food products, Seremetakis takes an emotive Greek regional peach to show how the senses can be seen as a mosaic of enmeshed memories, tastes, aromas, to ask 'how are the transformations of the senses experienced and conceptualized?' (1996:2). Sensory descriptions such as 'tastelessness', Seremetakis suggests, can be understood beyond simply statements of fact about the changing socio-economic, global and agricultural factors of food production and consumption. They also indicate a cultural incapacity to codify past, present and anticipatory experiences at the level of sensory existence (1996:1-18). In this way, attending to the rhetorics of sensual experience helps us explore the conjoining of individuals with the social problems of grappling with temporality and change.

The research presented in this thesis suggests that the capacity to narrate history is deeply entwined with sensory perception. Maturation and transformation of persons and things occur through the articulation of time and substance, whose products and sensory registers are the witnesses or record-keepers of material experience. Thus memory can be seen as both meta-sensory capacity and as a sense organ in itself (Seremetakis 1996:9). Additionally, the senses can be seen to offer a form of disclosure that is related to, but not the same as or automatically dependent on, the narrative and speech emphasised by Arendt ([1958] 1998), Jean-Klein (2000; 2003) and Gilsenan (1996) in their considerations of social action. In this thesis, the senses and material culture are treated as an apparatus for the production of social and historical reflexivity. For my Damascene informants, I would argue, it is the relationship between the temporality and the sensoriality of kinship which offers the dynamic to allow labour to become work and work to become action.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored activities such as family meals, property transmission, marriage, raising children and naming practices to draw attention to and consider questions of how people's personal lives and kinship in Damascus are actively intertwined with history through temporality and generations. My primary focus has been perceptions of time and patterned ways of experiencing and understanding its passage, which are expressed as particular temporal and generational kinship dispositions. I have explored the manner in which individuals relate to past, present and potential selves through narrative forms and their sensual mediation to generate, maintain and sometimes break kinship connections.

In the introduction, I outlined the analytical premise and problem behind my research interest: two forms of understanding sociality in the Middle East each containing notions about the passing of time and place of generations yet appearing to speak past one another. Socio-historical change has often been formulated as lineal and between successive generations, but the mechanics of the 'Arab family' have been explained as cyclical and reproducing between familial generations. My approach has been to think about the ways these models and their diachronic/synchronic implications might be conjoined and contrasted in the kinship of my Damascene informants. My discussion has underscored the importance of grappling with the scales and registers by which temporality was salient for my informants and on the dynamics of inter- and intra-generational relationships within and coming from the family.

Perceptions of time and temporal-generational dispositions

My primary analytical concern has been to address the ways in which individuals at specific points in their life-course relate to past and potential selves, with regard to situations and people they identify as significant. Through the temporal connections found in past and present practices, and the narratives my informants tell about them, I have sought to understand the relevant abstractions which allow them to share and utilise their perceptions of the passing of time and social change (Gell 1992). As

senses of maturation and shifts in expectation conjoin at the point of life-course and generational interaction, families and individuals try to find ways to work this to their advantage. In so doing they seek out forms of expressing, sharing and cultivating temporal-generational dispositions which give time and change meaning.

As Robertson (1991; 2001) suggests, meaning does not have an independent, stable existence; instead it is variable and mutable because it is body-bound and life-bound. Consequently, historical meaning, how time is understood, lives within the intergenerational transactions of life itself. For my Damascene informants, meaning was received and made selectively as they matured and continued to grow through their own and others' experiences. It appeared from their narratives that meanings of aging and social change elided with one another, linked by cumulative life-experiences and processes of cross-subjectivity between kin. For the most part, they believed that what matters to them today is what matters most. This placement in the present allowed them to utilise the past to consider the future. Therefore we see the changing relationship Mawiyah and Suhar had with their family photographs and the images and experiences they contained. Such inter-subjectivities with past selves and also changing family members appear as the living processes that sustain and imbue the kinship I discuss with emotional and affective meaning.

A prominent feature of the narratives of kinship history I collected was the layering of uncertainty with attempts at prediction in order to pre-empt contingency and unwanted outcomes. In creating continuities of memory, through practices of narrative and its inherent plot construction, my informants created linked 'wholes' of causality which they then employed in prognosis and action (Ricoeur 1979; 1980). In so doing they reasserted pre-existing chains of connection, between past, present and future and between the generations of kin which inhabited them.

My work shows the complex process by which personal memory and wider political, cultural, or social memory becomes entangled in narratives of kinship (Carsten 2007). Narrative, memory and temporality are continuously and progressively layered with each remembering and inflected with present concerns about the future, personal and political. Moreover they are often crafted by the plurality (Arendt [1958] 1998) and heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) which permeate them. Multiple voices speak out and through one another. In so doing, plurality

inflects the moral content of narratives, which are invariably told through multiple voices embodying different generational and kinship dispositions. In this way, kinship both creates and frames core understandings of memory and history, transmitting it from generation to generation. History and its remembrance are often posited in terms of specific kinship events, grounding or even overshadowing something politically larger, which is then repeatedly remembered in that context. As Pine (2007) observes, within kinship memories it is possible to distinguish differences between encompassing or generalising memories with their impersonal 'what it was like before' quality, and personal memories of major life events. 'These two interweave as the generalised memories set a particular scene which may then be punctuated, or unsettled, by the more personal' (Pine 2007:123). Added to this, she identifies family memories, which in their transmission from generation to generation maintain a sense of family identity, and those personal memories, which though relational, frame senses of experience through their specificity. What my ethnography suggests is that through shared narrative forms the interplay of these types of memory reveal firstly the ongoing nature of their impact, their capacity to shape current and future oriented decision making, and secondly a specific set of cross-generational and gendered divisions of work.

It is, this thesis suggests, the cultivation and control of specific forms of inter-subjectivity and their kinship practice (Joseph 1994; Jean-Klein 2003) which transform the labour of subsistence into the work of generation and memorial temporality. The means through which this is evident are in the successful reproduction of family through marriage, sharing food and naming children. Through practices which impart experience, personification and employ the senses, the capacity for memory is itself cultivated from senior to junior kin (Seremetakis 1996:225). These practices are not only one-way, lineal transmission between the generations, they also evidence a reciprocity of experience and witnessing, through which the terms of newness are negotiated with reference to differing temporal-generational dispositions towards natality and mortality.

Processes of memory-making, telling and the temporal links they contain are not about repetitive sameness or even the cyclical reproduction which characterises discussion of the 'Arab family'. Rather, it is a thoroughly historical and historicising

process that emphasises the difference between the young and the old, the living and the dead, the past and the present. This thesis argues that my informants have an historical and prognostic sense of the passing of time, reinforced by kinship and the dynamic mechanisms of its (re)production. Because it is situated in kinship and the means of generating new people, it is also generating history. Consequently, the interlocking of life-cycles through time and possible social change has been an underlying impetus of this research and something for which this thesis offers some compelling evidence. Thus the lives of my senior informants threaded through a large part of the history of Syria as a nation-state. Many were born in the inter-war French mandate period, living through shifting political and social change, such as the oscillations towards secular 'modernism' as most obviously embodied by Ba'athism and the reassertion of personal and political Islam. This period has also seen the increase and large-scale urbanisation of the population. Now they are aging in the context of large family networks, whose compositions and changing mores they have been and continue to be instrumental in shaping.

Analytical connections and conclusions

In Damascus, perceptions of temporality are mediated by shorter and longer term concerns with the links between past, present and future. The array of temporal scales and registers presented in this thesis are at points abstracted, compared and employed by my Damascene informants to help make decisions and frame volition. In a similar way to Bloch and Parry's (1989) model of distinctions between short-term forms of economic and subsistence transaction and longer-term forms of cosmological exchange and negotiation, it is the interaction and juxtaposition of different spheres which allow morally and conceptually complex or problematic elements of life to be negotiated. From my data, I would suggest it is the ambiguities created by juxtaposition of differently oriented temporal spheres which are crucial to understanding how personal aging and change, inter- and intra-generational relationships and history are co-implicated. Within and beyond the kinship I describe, differently oriented temporalities are embodied as temporal-generational dispositions. It is the qualities of these dispositions and the ambiguities of

temporalities which are specifically Damascene. Thus tensions and ambiguity might speak to wider temporal schema, such as short- versus long-term prioritisation, but for my informants they were often distinctly grounded in comparatively immediate problems such as whether it would be possible to marry their chosen partner, where they might find the next source of income or the meaning behind recent political events. This contextualised specificity gave currency to the evidential and experiential nature of narrative accounts between kin. Crucially it was shaped by the very terms of local kinship-based inter-subjectivity, which contain specific patterns of alliance, conflict and divisions of labour, themselves inflected by age, temporality and gender. Thus we see differentiated activities of memory and hope performed by specific kin constellations; mothers' and daughters' responsibilities of family remembering, fathers' and sons' emphasis on investment and the cross-gender and generation encompassing practices of food preservation and commensality. Herein lies the impression of cyclicity, as the terms of dealing with the complexities of differently-scaled temporalities rely in some respects on kinship structures which are themselves temporally-dependent.

Of particular ambiguity for my informants and me was the relationship between structural models of patriarchy, aged and gendered hierarchy, and the ever shifting experience of it as family members perform and shift roles. Hence it is possible to identify evidence of changing social forms, of patriarchal structures and connectivity, such as movements from larger dependent households of male kin to greater emphasis on conjugality (Inhorn 2012). This speaks to the core of situating my temporal-generational material in relation to social change. Paramount is the ambiguity between 'mortality' and 'natality' that different generational dispositions embody. So while Mannheim (1952) considers 'conceptualizations of knowledge' between wider age-cohort generations as socially and historically constituted, my material from Damascus suggests that it is at the intimate points where inter- and intra-generations are experienced via specific types of cross-subjectivity, that conceptualisations of knowledge are actively produced, contested and negotiated.

My Damascene material shows that these points of negotiation, where temporal-generational dispositions become apparent, can often be points of tension as well as cultivation. This can be seen in specific relationships, for example between

father and son of any age, or between larger kinship groups such as horizontal sets of agnates. All these relationships contain the potential for particular types of tension. However, central to my thesis is that the most evident form of mediation and ground for productive negotiation are contexts which include multiple generational dispositions being fulfilled. Thus father-son tensions are diffused by grandfather-father-son interaction, or mother-daughter power relations can be re-framed by the grandmother-mother-daughter layering of experience and expectation. Importantly, however, this requires each to be fulfilling their age-dependent generational roles, meaning that the potential contained in these relationships is foreclosed if one or more fails to perform the requisite elements, as understood at any one point in time. I would suggest, however, it is always the senior who is regarded as bearing the primary responsibility due to the hierarchies of authority and access to resources they may be able to exercise control over. Therefore a senior relative who is not prepared to devolve some aspects of control and resources is problematic. This, however, does not amount to a reified model of patriarchy in itself. Instead, it is the deployment of elements of that model as a template for action which can then be critiqued by its own participants, as they cultivate the requisite modes of responsibility which patriarchy helps to but does not exclusively frame.

In contexts of generational tension and their mediation, my Damascene informants often scrutinised society, social structure and logics of moral judgement in a way that partly resonates with Turner's (1967; 1969) concept of 'communitas', whereby points of transition or 'liminality' offer anti-structure which hold the seeds of change. Similarly, they reflect Arendt's ([1958] 1998) conceptualisation of 'action' whereby plurality and freedom allow for the beginning of something 'new' ([1958] 1998:7-9). However, unlike Turner and Arendt, my material from Damascus suggests that this is not confined to explicit points in rituals of 'anti-structure' *per se*, nor is it dependent on moments and places where the plurality of human existence is 'unmediated'. Instead, ethnographic grounding suggests that it is exactly at points which emphasise inter- and intra-generational cross-subjectivity, from choreographed processes of marriage-making, activities of sharing recipes and food, to negotiating religious subjectivity with personal desires and narratives inflected with history and morality, in which society may be scrutinised and potentiality for

the future may be explored. Moreover, these instances are mediated by three interconnected elements: firstly, the plurality and possibility to consider alternatives is most evident in the presence of multiple temporal-generational dispositions; secondly, that these elements are mediated and expressed through the heteroglossia present in many, though not all, narrative forms; and thirdly, inter-generational cross-subjectivity through narrative meanings are themselves mediated by a reciprocity of the senses which imparts the evidential nature of experience and social change. Importantly, it was exactly the relationship between the contestability of narratives in certain contexts (for example, contesting past and present kinship) and the evidence of substantive sensuality (for example, containing their own evidence and potential as kin through sharing) which made something approximating plurality possible.

Former futures & current crisis

A final word must be given to the political and humanitarian problems which Syrians have been and are experiencing, acting in and entrapped by at the point of submission (April 2012). Fieldwork experiences and subsequent analysis have made the political occurrence of uprisings, regime changes and contexts of violence and hope in the region appear simultaneously predictable and utterly surprising. This thesis speaks indirectly to commentary on the generational tensions of demographic, class, economic and political causality which have been mounting for decades within the region. What it more explicitly suggests is that for my informants in Damascus, before reifying generational divisions as instigators of change, there is a need to be mindful of inter- and intra-generational dynamics that operate within and beyond families. Of particular importance is the recognition that tensions which do exist towards access of resources and political instrumentality operate within the layering of multiple familial generations and their concomitant temporal dispositions as refracted through kinship labour, work and action. At the time of writing, many of my informants have activated their regional networks and temporarily evacuated Syria, putting in place the contingency plans they had created among kin. For those who have been unable to leave or chosen to stay, the modalities of hope and remembering that their kinship figurations contain offer sustenance for the future.

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